SPORT-SCAN DAILY BRIEF

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and it's time for NHL and NHLPA to do it

646210 Anaheim Ducks

Koivu skates with his TPS club in Finland

December 11th, 2012, 4:37 pm · · posted by Eric Stephens, Staff writer

The number of Ducks players that have been working out at Anaheim Ice during the NHL lockout have been dwindling over the last few weeks as Nick Bonino, Cam Fowler and Bobby Ryan have opted to find work in Europe.

Could Saku Koivu could finally be joining them and many others?

Koivu is in Finland skating with TPS Turku of the SM-liiga, the team he owns a piece of with his brother, Minnesota captain Mikko Koivu, as well as with Calgary goalie Miikka Kiprusoff. Whether the veteran center will actually play with them remains up in the air.

Sources close to Koivu told the Register that he won't be suiting up with TPS right away with one indicating that he wouldn't play with the team before Christmas while another said that he'll only play if the NHL season is lost to the current lockout.

Koivu has been closely monitoring the negotiations between owners and players and has previously told the Register that he'd eventually look at playing for TPS if no agreement were to be reached between the sides. The SM-liiga is on a break but returns to action on Dec. 18 and plays its first game after the holiday on Dec. 28.

The 38-year-old Koivu, who re-signed with the Ducks for 2012-13 at \$3 million plus appearance and performance bonuses, played for his hometown TPS team from 1992-95 before coming to the NHL with Montreal. He also played for TPS during the 2004-05 lockout.

Koivu could be joining a team that includes his brother along with St. Louis defensemen Kevin Shattenkirk and Kris Russell, Kings defenseman Alec Martinez and former NHL goalie Antero Niittymaki. Martinez is currently sidelined after being hit by a puck during a game last month.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 12.12.2012

646211 Calgary Flames

Flames goalie prospect thriving with Providence

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald December 11, 2012

For not the first time, Nate Leaman was watching a college freshman struggle in the face of his (new) peers.

The Providence Friars' head coach knew to not let it fester. So, before doubt could erode confidence, he took aside netminder Jon Gillies during training camp.

"He was over-thinking things," Leaman says now. "So I asked him what, when he's playing well, are the three or four things he's doing? So for one week, we just focused on him doing those three or four things well. That helped him turn things around.

"I wasn't worried because I've seen so many goalies go through that transition. The key is getting the guys to make sure they keep battling. But it's not easy. Hard work every day."

Gillies' recollection of the early days is no different.

"Coach Leaman brought me into his office (to make that list) . . . that really helped," says Gillies, who, after two winters with the USHL's Indiana Ice, had been a third-round pick of the Calgary Flames in June. "By the time the first game rolled around, I felt pretty acclimated."

Felt acclimated. Looked it, too.

Gillies has been twice named Hockey East's rookie of the week and twice named Hockey East's defensive player of the week. He was also the conference rookie of the month for October.

"Usually with freshmen, you see ups and downs," says Leaman. "But Jon's been the most consistent player on our team overall. It's real impressive what he's done to this point."

Gillies has started every one of Providence's 15 dates — including last week's 3-3 stalemate against hotshot Boston College (and Flames' prospects Johnny Gaudreau and Bill Arnold) — compiling a 1.95 goalsagainst average and a .928 save percentage.

Has he impressed even himself?

"'Impressed' isn't the word," replies the six-foot-five, 225-pounder. "I expect a lot out of myself. Always have. The words I'd use to describe it is more 'confident' and 'relieved,' because . . . as a freshman, could I carry the load? I think I've proven to my teammates and myself that I'm able to have their back if a breakdown does happen. So that has been good."

Not surprisingly, the Americans want to peek at Gillies prior to the world junior tourney in Russia.

Meaning Gillies — and two other netminders, John Gibson (OHL Kitchener) and Garret Sparks (OHL Guelph) — will gather in Tarrytown, N.Y., this weekend with the rest of the U.S. hopefuls. After three days there, the camp shifts to Finland. Dec. 19-23.

"I'm going to be a sponge and soak everything up," says the 18-year-old native of South Portland, Maine. "Being the younger guy, I fully understand that it's Gibson's (job) to lose — he's definitely earned it. I'm just going to go in there and work as hard as I can . . . and try to gain as much experience as I can and, hopefully, get back there next year.

"This is a two-year process for me — this year and next year. The thing that's most important to me now is being a good teammate."

About which the Friars can vouch.

The kid's two shutouts are the most for a Providence rookie since Chris Terreri bagged a pair in 1982-83.

It had been the Nov. 24 blanking of Brown that provided Gillies with his finest mental keepsake, so far.

"A 7-0 win, but I'd faced 14 shots going into the third period and I ended the game with 35," he says. "I knew that, with the way we were playing, it was only a matter of time till we increased our 3-0 lead. But 3-1 is a whole different game, 3-2 is a whole different game, so I worked hard that way, and I was really happy I could come up with some saves for my team."

C-NOTES: C Mark Jankowski, the Flames' first-round pick, has collected eight points — only two teammates have more. "Mark's my best friend and he's doing great," says Gillies. "I'm really happy to see it because some people weren't sure about his transition from prep school (in Stanstead, Que.) to college, but I definitely think he's proved himself."

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646212 Calgary Flames

Flames rookie Reinhart relieved after breaking 19-game goal-scoring drought

By WES GILBERTSON , Calgary Sun

Max Reinhart really needed a goal.

Really, really, really needed one.

Before finally lighting the lamp last Tuesday, the Abbotsford Heat centre had sweated through a 19-game goal-scoring drought, a span of 53 days that probably seemed more like an eternity for one of the Calgary Flames' most offensively-gifted prospects.

"That was actually a massive relief," Reinhart said.

"I don't think I've ever gone that long without scoring a goal. I was hitting a lot of posts. I was getting some goalies making some pretty good saves on me, and the frustration was building and building.

"As soon as I saw one go in the net, it just got me to relax. I'm just playing with a lot more confidence and smoothness now, and I'm not gripping my stick too tight. I think I just really needed to see one go in and get that mental block out of my mind."

After scoring 28 times in his final campaign with the WHL's Kootenay Ice, then potting a pair in his first outing with the Heat last spring, Reinhart was counting on being a regular offensive contributor in his first full season as a pro.

The 20-year-old opened the season on Abbotsford's second line but failed to produce and was demoted to a lesser role. With several forwards — including Sven Baerstchi, Lance Bouma and Akim Aliu — currently nursing injuries, Reinhart is back in the top six and trying to make the most of the opportunity.

He finally ended his dry-spell on a one-timer from the top of the circle in last Tuesday's 3-2 overtime loss to the San Antonio Rampage at Abbotsford Entertainment & Sports Centre, then picked the top shelf from the slot in Sunday's 3-2 win over the Toronto Marlies.

After Tuesday's 3-2 shootout loss against the Rochester Americans, the 6-foot-1, 180-lb. pivot has two goals and two assists in 23 games. He is also a team-worst minus-10 for the Heat, who remain atop the AHL standings.

"We have a really good team here and there's not a lot of room for a young guy like myself to just kind of coast through. It's creating a lot of competition for us to just get in the lineup, and I think that's the best thing that's happened for me," Reinhart said.

"You can't really take a break. You've always got to be mentally sharp. As a young guy, coming out of junior, it's not exactly the easiest thing to do. In the last couple of years, I've been able to get away with some nights off. You can't do that up here."

The son of former Flames and Vancouver Canucks defenceman Paul Reinhart and the eldest of three brothers with NHL potential, Max Reinhart's biggest strength is his ability to think the game.

Heat head coach Troy Ward believes the first-year pro has been better in all areas after finally finding the back of the net, giving him one less thing to worry about when he hits the ice.

"Max wants to feel the pressure on his hands and on his head to make plays. He enjoys that," Ward said. "The more icetime he gets, the more he feels like the game is on his back and the more he wants to be counted on, and I think that's what has changed here with the goal — he feels like, 'Now, I can contribute.'

"And not only is he trying to contribute now on the scoresheet, I think he's contributing in other areas. Before, he wasn't really scoring and he wasn't really contributing in the hard areas. His game is more balanced because of the goal. He's back to playing hard, plus he's playing really smart.

"I think he went through a really hard phase in the transition, and now he's pushing back where we expect him to be."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 12.12.2012 646213 Carolina Hurricanes

Clock ticking on NHL season

By Chip Alexander - calexander@newsobserver.com

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman has set a deadline – even if he says he hasn't – and the clock continues to tick.

Last week, after collective bargaining talks failed, Bettman said he does not have a drop-dead date for canceling the 2012-13 season. But he also said at least a 48-game season must be played to have a "season with integrity," meaning a resolution on a collective-bargaining agreement must come within the next few weeks.

The NHL and NHL Players Association will meet Wednesday, again looking to close the gap on a CBA that many seem to believe is so narrow. A federal mediator again will participate in the negotiations, which will be at a secret location away from the media glare.

The chief issues, at least from the league's perspective, have not changed and the league has not budged on them.

The league wants a 10-year CBA, with an opt-out after eight years. It wants maximum five-year lengths on new contracts — seven years for a team resigning its own player. It also is firm in opposing such transition issues as amnesty buyouts and capped escrow.

The players union, in turn, has proposed an eight-year CBA with opt-out after six years. It also wants an eight-year limit on new contracts.

"We started with a four-year (CBA proposal) and (the league) started at five years," Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Jay Harrison said last week. "They've moved to 10 and we've moved to eight. It doesn't seem like it's as big an issue as it has to be or as big as it is. The fact (the NHLPA) got to the eight, we've moved significantly."

To outsiders, the differences appear minimal, and puzzling. The two sides are allowing a \$3.3 billion industry to sit idle – all games through Dec. 30 have been canceled – while they argue over such things as a 10-year vs. eight-year CBA?

Contracts lengths are important to the players. The longer, the better. But an eight-year cap? Teams can only insure contracts through seven years.

Many players believe shorter-term contracts will have teams paying star players more money per season, leaving less for the lower-salaried players. That's the kind of salary-cap squeeze most players would like to avoid.

Harrison noted the union and league generally have agreed on such major issues as the division of hockey-related revenue and pensions. Much work has been done. A CBA is so close, yet still so far from being completed.

"We are agreed on the pension, we are agreed on the money ...," Harrison said. "We're simply trying to find a way to fix the contracting issues that (the owners) are very strict on, and we are, too. Those mean a lot when you're in a market that's capped."

In a negotiating twist, at Bettman's request a small group of NHL owners met with a panel of players last week in New York. There were marathon negotiating sessions Tuesday and Wednesday before everything fell apart Thursday when the league informed the NHLPA the union's CBA proposal was not acceptable.

"I heard we were close last week," Hurricanes forward Anthony Stewart said Monday.

The NHL and NHLPA invited in federal mediators a few weeks ago, but mediation could not end the impasse. When the NHLPA again requested

last week that a mediator be involved, Bettman more or less dismissed mediation as having "no value."

But a mediator is back, even if he can only offer advice and nothing is binding on the league or union.

"The sooner we get back to the table and figure everything out, the better for everybody," Stewart said.

News Observer LOADED: 12.12.2012

646214 Carolina Hurricanes

DeCock: Dark times for NHL, but hope may be around corner

By Luke DeCock - staff columnist - Idecock@newsobserver.com

Another chunk of the schedule, gone. For 20 more days, the Carolina Hurricanes are guaranteed not to be playing games. The NHL lockout has now wiped out more than 40 percent of the season a mere eight years after another lockout took the entire 2004-05 season off the books.

It's a depressing day for hockey fans, particularly after all the false hopes raised by last week's negotiations in New York, when a few days of what seemed like progress were nullified in an hour's worth of theater of the absurd – the NHL rejecting an NHL Players Association proposal by voice mail in the middle of an NHLPA press conference Thursday night, NHLPA boss Donald Fehr declaring a settlement close at hand only to be mocked by NHL commissioner Gary Bettman later that night.

It was disheartening stuff, particularly after direct discussions between players and moderate owners appeared to yield progress that had not been forthcoming between Bettman and Fehr and their lawyerly minions.

The Winter Classic vanished into the ether long ago, as did the Hurricanes' much-anticipated Opening Night debuts of Jordan Staal and Alexander Semin. Throw in last week's fiasco on ice and it's hard to blame hockey fans for losing hope.

They've seen this movie before. They know how it ends.

Yet these dark moments may be the cloud that hides the rising sun. Theatrics and rhetoric aside, the two sides are closer to an agreement now than they have ever been. At this point, they are separated less by finances and contract terms than they are by philosophy.

The NHL's entire strategy appears to have been designed to discredit Fehr and sow discontent within the union. That hasn't happened – in fact, players were surprised to find they knew more about the NHL's position than some of the moderate owners who joined the talks last week.

"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," Los Angeles Kings forward and Raleigh resident Kevin Westgarth, one of the NHLPA's most active members, told the New York Times.

The NHLPA's goal at this point is really peace with honor, salvaging enough from these negotiations to make it worthwhile. That may happen at the bargaining table. It may happen through decertification, which would essentially dissolve the union and create the threat of antitrust lawsuits against the NHL. (That's how the NBA's union forced a settlement last fall with a previously intransigent NBA.)

There's too much at stake here to let egos and agendas get in the way. The NHL may not be a \$3.3 billion business any more – this lockout has surely taken care of that – but there are still billions of dollars on the table, waiting to be split between owners and players. Even a partial season will salvage some of that while preserving corporate sponsorships, TV packages, naming-rights deals and season-ticket bases, the economic engines of the league.

These are dark times for hockey fans. Hope is hard to find, optimism even harder. There's still time, though – time to play half a season starting in January, time to move the incremental distance to common ground, time to stop this foolishness and get the NHL back on the ice.

The situation has never looked more grim. The solution has never been closer at hand.

News Observer LOADED: 12.12.2012

646215 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL, union to resume talks Wednesday

By Chris Kuc

The NHL and players' association will return to the negotiating table Wednesday in an effort to end the lockout that reached its 87th day on Tuesday.

"We plan to meet (Wednesday) and we have agreed to involve a federal mediator," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said in an e-mail to the Tribune

The sides have agreed to keep the location of the meeting a secret to help facilitate the process. Owners are not expected to attend but a number of players--it's not yet known who or how many--will be in the room.

The NHL canceled games through Dec. 30 on Monday and the hopes for any kind of season dwinde with each passing day. Talks between the league and NHLPA on a new collective bargaining agreement broke off last Thursday and there have been no formal meetings since that time.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 12.12.2012

646216 Dallas Stars

Stars prospect report: Matej Stransky finding his scoring stride

MIKE HEIKA

One of the things the Stars have done in the last five or six years is go after pure skill in more rounds of the draft.

Yes, there are defensive defensemen drafted, and yes, Radek Faksa is probably more an NHL checker than a scorer, but you can see by the success of some of the later round picks that this is a team that wants skill and scoring.

Matej Stransky is testament to that. Taken 165th in 2011, Stransky is a big (6-2, 190) forward who can shoot the puck, and he is showing right now in the Western Hockey League. Stransky was born in the Czech Republic, but he is in his third season of Canadian Junior play. He showed last season that he was something more than a sixth round pick when he collected 81 points (39G, 42A) in 70 games. This season, he got off to a slow start and some wondered if maybe he was just a flash in the pan. But he's showing that's not the case.

Stransky last week had eight points (5G, 3A) in three games and now has 11 goals in his last 11 games. He is up to the pace he had last season with 35 points (16G, 19A) in 30 games, and looks like he might even exceed his numbers from 2011-12.

Stransky was left off the preliminary roster for the Czech Republic's World Junior Team, so we won't be able to see if he and Faksa have chemistry, but he could use that as motivation for the remainder of the season. He's definitely found his scoring stride again.

In other prospects news, Brett Ritchie continues his hot hand. He had three goals in two games last week for Niagara and heads off to Canada's World Junior camp this week with 27 goals in 32 games. He has a great chance of making Canada's roster.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646217 Detroit Red Wings

NHL sides to meet today; Red Wings players stay in shape

By Helene St. James

The NHL and NL Players' Association plan to meet again today before nonbinding federal mediators to see whether they can agree on enough issues to start the 2012-13 season.

It already has been delayed by the three months since owners locked out players Sept. 16, prompting some Red Wings to go overseas to play, others to practice in Troy.

The Troy group -- consisting in general of Niklas Kronwall, Danny Cleary, Todd Bertuzzi, Johan Franzen, Jonathan Ericsson, Darren Helm, Justin Abdelkader and goalies Jimmy Howard and Jonas Gustavsson, plus locals from other NHL teams -- routinely have skated three times a week to maintain their conditioning. But a self-run practice isn't going to put them on par with the guys who have been playing in other leagues when and if the NHL should resume.

"It always takes a little while to get back up to speed -- that's why you have camp and exhibition season," defenseman lan White said. "Those guys, they're playing good hockey over there, and they'll be a little bit ahead of us."

Guys playing overseas include Henrik Zetterberg, Pavel Datsyuk, Damien Brunner, Jan Mursak and Jakub Kindl.

"I think anybody who is playing is going to be at an advantage, for sure," Cleary said. "You can never duplicate the game speed, game conditioning. It'll take some time for guys who haven't played to get up to speed."

Including exhibition games, which can be as many as nine, training camp normally lasts about three weeks. This year's version would be at most 10 days.

"There's nothing you can do about that -- it's definitely going to be a short training camp," Cleary said. "It's going to take weeks to get going, to be where you normally see players. Anytime you have a shortened season and are going to be playing every other night, there's going to be injuries, for sure. There's going to be a big importance for guys on, if you feel anything, to take rest."

On the other hand, Datsyuk already has played 25 games, Zetterberg 17 and Brunner 27.

"They might be a little fatigued, too," White said. "Who knows how it's going to play out, but hopefully we'll be playing."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.12.2012

646218 Detroit Red Wings

League is negligent in mission to grow game, ex-NHL owner tells CBC

By Gregg Krupa

Knowing what any NHL owner may be thinking of the owners' lockout of players and the long-delayed start of the season is nearly impossible, in part, because they face considerable fines from the league if they speak out

So a CBC interview with the former owner of the Canucks, Arthur Griffiths, provides an opportunity to learn what someone who once owned a club is thinking.

Like many observers, Griffiths has some sympathy with the players.

In the interview with Ian Hanomansing, of CBC News, Griffiths raises some interesting issues, and expresses a series of disappointments with how the negotiations have been handled, from the start, especially in light of the finances of the NHL.

"One of which was the game is growing, the revenues are there and, at the end if the day, you know, isn't that what this is all about?" Griffiths said.

It is unlikely that when the previous collective bargaining agreement was signed that the owners realized revenue would increase by more than one-third, to \$3.3 billion, over the course of the contract. Meanwhile, the players' share, thanks to individual negotiations with owners, rose to 57 percent.

"Therein lies the problem," Griffiths said.

The owners wanted a big chunk of that revenue for themselves and their franchises, and they have pushed hard.

Once the owners got the players to a 50-50 split of revenue, like many observers, Griffiths said he is surprised it has not resulted in a deal.

"It's a disappointment," he said. "The owners have suddenly come back to the table and found this solidarity that disregards the growth in the game and disregards that in some markets it's beginning to show the progress you want.

"It's just ridiculous to me, at this point."

Griffiths is a successful Canadian businessman who has dabbled in the politics of the Liberal Party. He sold the team in 1997.

He said an agreement must be struck within two weeks to save the season.

"I think they'll find a way to make it happen."

The vast majority of players, coaches and others who have had no income for months, are bringing pressure to bear, he said.

If the season is lost, Griffiths said, the NHL would not be destroyed.

"The game is not going to be, to me, destroyed, if you will, by another cancelled season. It is just a horrible, horrible, horrible black mark for both sides, and it is a game that comes down to the fans.

"It's hard to get those fans back, particularly in some the markets where they are not as passionate as they might be in some markets. There is a lot of risk.

"Maybe this is a time, if they so destroy this season again, maybe there needs to be a massive shakeup both in the markets and in the players' side, and maybe start all over again.

"This is now coming to maybe the beginning of a better day."

Detroit News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646219 Detroit Red Wings

NHL talks to resume Wednesday under secrecy, contracting issues remain sticking point to CBA

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

TROY – It didn't take long for the NHL and NHL Players Association to agree to get back together after labor talks broke off in a bad way last Thursday in New York.

The sides will resume negotiations Wednesday at an undisclosed location.

This time, they'll be joined by federal mediators, at the NHLPA's request. Two days of talks under the watch of mediators on Nov. 28-29 failed to produce any results.

Union executive director Don Fehr and many players said the sides have agreed on some issues and aren't that far apart on many others. The NHL doesn't appear to share that view, however.

"We made up a lot of ground in New York," Detroit Red Wings forward Danny Cleary said. "Don't give up hope. There's still time."

The league on Monday canceled games through Dec. 30. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has said the season can't be shorter than 48 games and the Stanley Cup finals must end in June. For that to happen, the season must start no later than Jan. 20, as it did during the lockout-shortened 1995 campaign.

Players said the past week has been an emotional roller coaster.

"Can't get too high or too low. Just wait for the call and when it happens, it happens," Red Wings forward Todd Bertuzzi said. "It's unfortunate we're in this predicament right now, especially coming off what I think is an outstanding past five years. I think our hockey is bigger and better than it's ever been."

The NHLPA believes the sides have agreed on how to split revenues (50-50, with owners agreeing to fund \$300 million toward the "Make Whole" provision to ensure existing contracts are paid in full).

But, they haven't agreed on several contracting issues.

The league wants a five-year limit on contracts (seven years for a club's own free agents), a five-percent maximum salary variance in contracts and a 10-year CBA (with an opt-out clause after eight years). Owners also oppose a cap on escrow payments and an amnesty clause, which would enable teams to buy out a player without a salary-cap penalty.

Players have proposed an eight-year limit on contracts, a 25-percent salary variance in contracts and a eight-year CBA (with an opt-out clause after six years). They also want a cap on escrow payments (money taken out of players' checks to assure both sides receive their agreed upon share of revenues) and favor the amnesty buyout.

Detroit defenseman Ian White recently was asked if these seemingly minor differences are worth losing a season over.

"You'd ask them the same question, is it worth losing the season over?" White said. "The amount of money that has been lost to date for both sides, you're not going to get that back. But more than that, just the damage to the game.

"You see the Forbes report, where the average (franchise) value is \$282 million and the average increase was 18 percent. In this economy that's a pretty good return on your investment. If we kept playing this year, I'm sure you'd slash \$10 million in salaries under the equation and the values of the teams would go up that much more, so these guys are making tons of money. To throw it all away is just bizarre."

Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard echoed the sentiments of many in the union by saying players aren't just taking a strong stance for themselves.

"We can't be throwing guys that aren't in the league yet under the bus," Howard said.

He called the whole process an eye-opener.

"It reminds you that even though we play a game we love, it's a business," Howard said.

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.12.2012

646220 Edmonton Oilers

Smyth may opt to play in Swiss Spengler Cup if NHL lockout continues

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton JournalDecember 11, 2012biglife

EDMONTON - If the NHL lockout continues, Ryan Smyth will likely spend Christmas in the Swiss Alps — playing hockey, not skiing.

The 36-year-old Edmonton Oilers winger hasn't played a game since last April, but he's on Hockey Canada's radar to play in the Spengler Cup in the picturesque city of Davos. That's where Oilers head coach Ralph Krueger has a home. Maybe Smyth can stay at the coach's place if he brings over his wife, Stacey, and the kids for a winter wonderland holiday.

The Spengler Cup, the oldest hockey tournament in the world, which started in 1923, begins Boxing Day.

Canada's in a pool with Adler Mannheim (Germany) and the host HC Davos club. In the other pool, there's Salavat Ufa (Russia), HC Vitkovice (Czech) and Fribourg-Gotteron (Switzerland).

Doug Shedden, coaching former Oilers winger Linus Omark, Detroit Red Wings star Henrik Zetterberg and Damian Brunner in Zug (Swiss Elite League), is Canada's head coach. Marty McSorley's brother, Chris, who has coached in Geneva since 2001, is his assistant.

Unlike a number of locked-out NHLers who have been playing in Europe during the last few months, Smyth has only been skating with the Western Hockey League's Edmonton Oil Kings.

But it's no secret that Hockey Canada values Smyth's unwavering support of its program over the years. He never turns them down when they ask if he can play in the world championship.

Smyth, who has also played for Canada at the Olympics, has never been in the Spengler, but the tournament would be like a life-jacket to him, He has been dying to play some games, but opted not to go to Europe with a young family during the lockout.

Canada could also have access to NHL forwards Tyler Seguin, who's playing in Biel; John Tavares, Bern; Patrice Bergeron, Lugano; Brooks Laich, Kloten' Danny Briere, Berlin' Joffrey Lupul, playing in the Kontinental Hockey League; Sam Gagner, Klagenfurt; Jamie Benn Hamburg; and Tyler Ennis, who played 10 games in Langnau, Switzerland.

There's also defencemen Stephane Robidas, Jared Spurgeon (he was also in Langnau, but departed), and Andrew Ference, who are all playing overseas.

Los Angeles Kings goalie Jonathan Bernier has been in Germany and could play.

Joe Thornton is playing in Davos, so he could play for them. Max Talbot is in Geneva, so would suit up for them.

During the 1994-95 lockout, many NHL veterans struggled during the 48-game season. As Sportsnet's lan Mendes pointed out, the list included Wayne Gretzky, Doug Gilmour, Mike Gartner and Dale Hawerchuk. Some of that had to do with diminishing skills, like in No. 99's case.

Gretzky had 48 points in 48 games after getting 130 points in 81 games the season before.

Gilmour had 33 in 44 season-shortened games after 105 in 1993-94. Gartner went from 64 points to 20 in 38 games in the half-season. But defenceman Ray Bourque had no drop-off.

Is Smyth worried? Fewer games means older players still have their legs, but a shortened season means more games are crammed into a very short time frame.

"There's pros and cons. You play fewer games and that gives you time to repair your body," said Smyth.

"I've always thought it as an opportunity (with time off from playing) to better yourself as a person — a husband and a father. After that, working on my training," said Smyth.

"I'm very fortunate I've been able to skate with such high-level players (the Oil Kings)."

Smyth was a point-a-game player for the first two months of the 2011-12 NHL season, but he slowed noticeably statistically in the second half.

Did age catch up to him?

"No, I wouldn't say I ran out of gas. In the second half, we started playing differently because we were out of the playoffs. We wanted to see what the young guys were like and I got put in different roles," he said.

The style of NHL hockey might change in a 48-game season — every game would mean so much. It's like a playoff run. Maybe teams will play more defensive styles.

"I think it would be easier on an older player, playing defensively. Not as much skating, but I've been blessed to have the skating ability to keep up to the youth that's come in. A more sitback style, more trapping, I think that works in the older players."

"A shorter season means fewer games, but the intensity would definitely be there because you're playing every second night."

Smyth lost a whole season's salary in 2004-05 with the entire season scrapped, and he's out about \$1 million this time around with the lockout. He doesn't have a wealth of years left like Tavares or Seguin, but that's life.

"I can't sit there and dwell on what happened in the past. I do that and I'm hurting my myself and my family," he said.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.12.2012

646221 Edmonton Oilers

Backup Oil Kings goalie relishes chance to start

By Jim Matheson

EDMONTON - Tristan Jarry is driving the Laurent Brossoit bandwagon as the latter auditions for a goalie spot on Canada's world junior team this week at camp in Calgary.

Jarry wants to see his fellow Edmonton Oil Kings netminder on the Canadian squad for the worlds in Ufa, Russia, not just because he's a junior teammate, but also because if Brossoit is going to Russia, that means the net's all his for close to a month.

This is Jarry's shot at being more than a backup in his NHL draft year with the Western Hockey League season approaching the halfway point, although his small sample stats are terrific — 11 games, two shutouts, 17 goals allowed, 1.62 average and a .931 save percentage. He has the best numbers in the WHL, albeit in only 631 minutes of work.

"Hopefully, L.B. makes the team. If so, I'll get 10 or 11 games straight — I'd get the workload, and I'd be sharing space with a younger guy (midget AAA goalie Patrick Dea), something I would look forward to," said Jarry, who hasn't played more than two in a row as the Oil Kings prepare for the powerhouse Kamloops Blazers Wednesday at Rexall Place.

He's accepted his lot in life — pretty much every 17-year-old goalie in the WHL is waiting his turn, save for the odd precocious kid such as Justin Paulic in Moose Jaw or Eric Comrie in Tri-City, who is also eligible in this June's draft.

Usually, you don't get a sniff to be a No. 1 on a team that was in the Memorial Cup last spring.

"Let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. L.B. has to go in and make that Canadian club team first," Oil Kings' coach Derek Laxdal said yesterday at team practice. "But if he does, this is a challenge for Tristan. If L.B. doesn't come back to us, Tristan is getting lots of games over the Christmas holidays. And, so far, he's done a really good job with a 7-3 record. He's earned this."

Jarry, who started playing goal at seven, and Brossoit, 19, go a long way back.

"I grew up with him (in B.C.) We played against each other in summer hockey, and we train with the same goalie coach," Jarry said.

Brossoit's advice to Jarry is probably simple: If you're the starter now, get lots of rest.

"I get lots anyway. Getting up every day to go to school," laughed Jarry, who won't have to worry about exams until next month.

He's a cool cat. Not much bothers the 6'2", 181-pound goalie.

"What I like about Tristan is his demeanour in the net. He goes about his business. Doesn't matter if he gets scored on," Laxdal said.

That's probably because he's seldom digging pucks out of the net. He's had six starts where he's given up one or fewer goals.

And Laxdal hasn't protected him by throwing him in against mere stocking stuffers. Jarry's faced the Prince Albert Raiders (East Division leaders) twice and has been thrown in to play plus-.500 teams such as Lethbridge (twice), along with middle-of-the-road clubs in Moose Jaw and Medicine Hat. He's played twice against Kootenay and once against bottom-feeding Vancouver and Prince George.

Laxdal will get a much better read on Jarry playing every game, though. So will the NHL scouts. Jarry could be a third-round pick in June.

"Kamloops will be the best team I've gone against," said Jarry.

Brossoit has played both contests against the Blazers thus far in 2012-13: in a 2-1 win in Kamloops and in a 5-4 shootout loss here.

Local boy Colin Smith, a graduate of the Vimy Academy's hockey program and a forward who has been at some Oilers prospect camps, leads the WHL in scoring. The Kamloops forward had 39 points going into Tuesday's game in Calgary, two more than teammate J.C. Lipon, who is at the Canadian junior selection sessions.

Canada is taking three goalies to the worlds to guard against injury with their first two. What if Brossoit was the No. 3 behind Malcolm Subban and Jordan Binnington, the two OHL goalies? That's basically a cheerleading role unless somebody gets hurt. Would Brossoit want to do that? Would the Oil Kings ask Hockey Canada to take somebody else to get their starter back?

"You would sit there for two weeks (of the tournament) doing nothing (as a No. 3)," said Oil Kings' GM Bob Green.

"The toughest part is it's a hard place to get a goalie to in a hurry (if anybody got hurt.)"

ON THE BENCH

With Griffin Reinhart at the world junior team camp, forward Brett Pollock has been moved back to defence. "He played there in bantam and midget," said Laxdal ... Travis Ewanyk (sprained knee) was still in a yellow (no contact) jersey at practice Tuesday, so he won't play against Kamloops. He's been out about a month now. Martin Gernat (shoulder surgery) is still in yellow, too. They hope to get him back after Christmas.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.12.2012

646222 Montreal Canadiens

Gorges weighs in on talks to date, latest stab at a CBA

Posted by Dave Stubbs

Canadiens defenceman Josh Gorges, the Canadiens NHLPA rep, appeared for a couple of hours Tuesday afternoon at fashion retailer RW&CO.'s store in downtown Montreal's Place Ville Marie.

Before he met with fans to sign with autographs, Gorges spoke to a few media about the state of the CBA talks to date, his expectations for Wednesday's session, and a little about his new-found fashion sense. More on the third topic in a Gazette feature coming in Thursday's paper and online

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 12.12.2012

646223 Nashville Predators

Predators prospect Mattias Ekholm proves he can play

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."

Tennessean LOADED: 12.12.2012

646224 New Jersey Devils

'Dysfunctional' Business Model Puts the N.H.L. in Peril, Experts Say

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

During the last 20 years, the N.H.L. has lost nearly 10 percent of its scheduled games to labor disruptions, a rate of cancellation more than three times greater than any other major sports league in North America.

With the current lockout in its 88th day, negotiators from the N.H.L. and the players union are scheduled to begin a new round of talks Wednesday at an undisclosed location, with federal mediators in attendance. Even if they make rapid progress, the damage done by the third lockout under Commissioner Gary Bettman is likely to affect the league well into the future, advertising and branding experts said.

"Clearly, its business model is dysfunctional," said Tony Knopp, the chief executive of Spotlight TMS, a company that manages corporate ticket sales. "Things have to be terrible for them to be willing to throw away two seasons in less than 10 years."

Bettman was hired 20 years ago Wednesday. Since his first full season as the commissioner in 1993-94, 2,224 regular-season N.H.L. games have been canceled because of lockouts in 1994-95, 2004-5 and 2012. That is 9.7 percent of the 22,882 N.H.L. games scheduled from October 1993 through Dec. 30, including the Winter Classic on Jan. 1.

No other major league has a similar rate of cancellation over the same period. The next closest is the N.B.A., which also has had three lockouts since 1993 but only lost 3.1 percent of its scheduled regular-season games. Major League Baseball has lost 2.1 percent of its regular-season games and the 1994 postseason to a strike, and the N.F.L. did not cancel any regular-season games last year during its lockout.

"To lose almost 10 percent of your games to lockouts, that's a chilling number," said Bob Gutkowski, a partner at the private equity firm Innovative Sports and Entertainment and formerly a member of the N.H.L. Board of Governors as the president of Madison Square Garden.

The N.H.L.'s 2004-5 lockout wiped out the regular season and Stanley Cup playoffs, the only season in North American major league sports to be lost to a labor dispute. At that point, the N.H.L. was a money-losing enterprise

that had largely receded from the wider sports consciousness in much of the United States.

The league bounced back through rule changes that made the game more exciting, and because the Winter Classic and the Winter Olympics helped draw new fans. Fans in the United States returned with the success of teams in Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and New York, and a strong Canadian dollar increased revenue north of the border.

N.H.L. revenue grew from about \$2 billion in 2005-6 to \$3.3 billion last season. The league's profitability made this season's lockout seem counterintuitive.

But today's N.H.L. is in many ways as troubled as it was before the previous lockout. The Toronto Maple Leafs, the Rangers and the Montreal Canadiens generate about 80 percent of the league's revenue, according to Forbes magazine's valuations, which have been disputed but are the most widely used measure of league finances. The magazine estimated that 13 of the league's 30 teams are losing money, some more than \$10 million a year.

"Missing so many games shows that for some of these teams, it's better when they're not playing, because then they're not losing money," said Drew Dorweiler, a managing partner of the business evaluation firm Dartmouth Partners in Montreal. "In a nutshell, it's because there's a structural nonviability of certain franchises in their current locations."

Dorweiler cited money-losing clubs in Nashville; Columbus, Ohio; Florida; and Phoenix, a team he called a wounded animal.

Despite a new 10-year, \$2 billion contract with NBC, Gutkowski said: "The N.H.L. doesn't get the kind of national TV money that the other leagues get, which means most of revenue is locally driven. And in a lot of markets, it's very hard to make it work."

Bettman has often explained that as with the last lockout, this one is about limiting players' salaries to control costs.

"Too many people are forgetting where we were 10 years ago," Bettman said last Thursday after he rejected the union's latest offer for a settlement. "We didn't have a healthy game and we had too many franchises that couldn't continue. We did what we had to do in 2004 to make it right, and we're focused with our owners on what we need to make this game healthy for our fans."

One way to get healthy is to establish labor peace, said Jay Grossman, an N.H.L. player agent.

"Though the routes that baseball and football have taken to labor peace have been vastly different, both realize that labor peace equates to record growth in revenue and franchise values leaguewide," he said. "The notion that an unconditional attack on players in three consecutive lockouts will enable growth for every N.H.L. club misses the mark."

Brian Cooper, the president of the Toronto sports management company S&E Sponsorship Group, said the current lockout would hurt the N.H.L's business.

"To many people, this has become a pattern, an M.O.," he said. "It's almost as if consumers and sponsors are getting the message, 'Enjoy the next six or seven years, because you know we're going to be out the year after that.'

He added: "What people want from a brand is consistency of product, accessibility and emotional connection that's uninterrupted. These lockouts interrupt everything."

But the N.B.A. came back from a truncated season last year and had its best metrics across the board, Cooper said. "If that can happen," he said, "maybe the N.H.L. can come back too."

New York Times LOADED: 12.12.2012

646225 New Jersey Devils

Former Devils winger Steve Thomas thriving as AHL assistant coach

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

Former Devils winger Steve Thomas could be on his way back to the NHL as a coach some day, but right now he is happy as an assistant coach with the Syracuse Crunch (AHL).

The Crunch, an affiliate of the Tampa Bay Lightning, are second in the AHL's Eastern Conference and Thomas fits in well alongside head coach Jon Cooper.

"I'm a positive guy behind the bench," Thomas said. "Guys have questions for me and I know the system pretty well. I can critique them or give them a pat on the back when they come off the ice. More than anything, I think I'm just more of a positive influence back there."

During his 20-year NHL career, Thomas scored 421 goals while playing for six teams – the Toronto Maple Leafs, Chicago Blackhawks, Islanders, Devils, Anaheim Ducks and Detroit Red Wings.

"I coached bantam minor midget when I retired," Thomas said. "I coached my son's team and I took a bit of a shine to it. I was coaching my own son and that gave me an opportunity to spend some time with him, whereas I didn't have that opportunity when I was playing.

"That was a good thing for me and that kind of got my feet wet and maybe got me interested in pursuing this. But I didn't think I'd be on the bench as quickly as I was at the American League level. You get a little bit lucky every now and then."

He became an assistant for Norfolk late last season, staying on as the Admirals won the Calder Cup.

"That was a big thrill for me, having played 20 years and not having won a Stanley Cup or any real significant hardware," Thomas recalled.

When the Tampa Bay Lightning dropped Norfolk (now affiliated with the Anaheim Ducks) after winning the AHL title, Thomas and the coaching staff wound up in Syracuse.

Thomas, who was in the 1986 movie "Youngblood" with Patrick Swayze, Rob Lowe and Keanue Reeves, joked of coaching in the minors: "I didn't get a casting call for another movie opportunity."

He is, in fact, still in the same league as son, Christian, who was the Rangers' second-round pick (40th overall) in the 2010 entry draft and is playing for Connecticut Whale. Thomas said the level of competition in the AHL has risen significantly with the influx of NHL players during the lockout. That will help Christian Thomas.

"He's playing in a league that is quite possibly the best in hockey right now," Thomas said. "For my own son to be playing with and against such talented players, it will only help his development. It's really good hockey."

Good for his own career as an assistant coach, as well.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.12.2012 646226 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout: If season lost, some players' NHL careers will be over

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

For the first time in the 87-day NHL lockout, the drop-dead date for playing even a partial schedule is now within sight. Unless the league and its players can negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement and begin playing games by mid January, the entire 2012-13 season will be lost.

If that occurs, it is likely hockey will lose several prominent players whose careers will come to an end because of the lengthy layoff.

It happened after the last lockout claimed the entire 2004-05 season. A group of star players that included Scott Stevens, Mark Messier, Ron Francis and Adam Oates never played again.

Even though there is an undercurrent of optimism that the resumption of negotiations in New York could lead to a relatively quick settlement, the possibility remains that this could be '04-05 all over again.

"Absolutely. Look at the number of guys it impacted last time and some of the big names we lost," said Albany Devils center Stephen Gionta, whose own opportunity to finally stay in the NHL is being hurt by the lockout. "One in particular was Scott Stevens. He never played another game after the last lockout and that's unfortunate because he was such an instrumental guy in the league. He didn't get the right sendoff in his career. That happened to a few guys who didn't have the opportunity to get the right retirement and honor for what they did in the league."

Former Devils winger Steve Thomas was one of those players. His 20-year NHL career was over after the last lockout. Now an assistant coach with the Syracuse Crunch in the AHL, Thomas said the new CBA is likely to impact some players no matter when the labor dispute is settled.

"I'm sure when it gets ratified there are going to be some changes to the CBA and that may affect a certain number of players," Thomas said.
"Depending on the salary cap, there will be players maybe pushed out.
Older players may be pushed out for younger players. There is no question there are going to be some established NHLers who may not have a job."

Others will have to decide if they want to keep playing.

Among those who could be on the fence if the season is canceled are Teemu Selanne, Daniel Alfredsson, Brian Rolston and Jaromir Jagr. The feeling is that the career of Flyers defenseman Chris Pronger, who played only 13 games last season because of post-concussion syndrome, is over regardless of when the lockout ends.

Then there are those whose only real shot at sticking in the NHL may pass them by.

"Look at some of the guys around the league who were on the fence before this season before the lockout even started," said Gionta. "And guys who considered retiring. Who knows how many will continue next year if, for some reason, there is no season. Will they continue on or move on?"

Looking back, Thomas doesn't feel bitter about missing out on a farewell tour.

"I played for 20 years. The way I played, I needed to be a strong forechecking player with some tenacity," he said. "The way my body felt at that point in my career, I didn't know if I was going to be able to play like that. And if I wasn't going to be that player, then I wasn't going to be an effective player.

"I really didn't think about a farewell tour or anything like that. I didn't even announce my retirement. I kind of just sailed off into the sunset, which was okay by me."

The question now is whether this NHL season can be saved, or whether some current players will simply ride off into the sunset.

"It's tough to understand why this is taking place," Thomas said of the lockout. "I haven't really stayed that much abreast of what is going on in regards to the finer points of negotiations, but there are a lot of people affected by the NHL not playing like people who work in the (arenas) and bar owners.

"When I'm back in Toronto it's non-stop lockout (talk) and there are a lot of upset people that really don't understand why this is where it is because there is big money in the game. The players are paid handsomely and these NHL teams are kind of like a hobby for the owners with some of their business (ventures) for the most part."

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.12.2012 646227 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout: CBA talks will resume Wednesday in New York

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

Six days after collective bargaining negotiations between NHL owners and players broke down, the two sides will resume talks tomorrow at an undisclosed location in New York.

According to deputy commissioner Bill Daly, there will be no owners involved this time. Two sessions last week were held with six owners and a group of 18 players but neither commissioner Gary Bettman nor NHL Players' Association executive director Don Fehr. On the third day-Thursday-- those parties enter the picture and talks broke down.

More than 40 percent of the regular season has been canceled since the league and NHL Players' Association have been unable to negotiate a new CBA. The old deal expired Sept. 15.

Games have been canceled through Dec. 30, as well as the Jan. 1 Winter Classic.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.12.2012 646228 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout update: NHL, NHLPA reportedly resuming negotiations on Wednesday in undisclosed location

Charles Curtis, NJ.com By Charles Curtis, NJ.com

If the NHL lockout was an actual game of hockey, we've reached the end of the second intermission, with the puck about to drop on the third period.

According to ESPN's Pierre LeBrun, the NHL and the players' association are set to continue negotiating on Wednesday, with no location announced.

Why the lack of a site? "Seeing how the two sides handled themselves last time the media knew where they were and cameras were present, we had Commissioner Gary Bettman going on a near 45-minute rant, for wont of a better word, about the negotiations and the union's role in them," wrote CBSSports.com's Brian Stubits. "While an undisclosed location means lack of information for us hockey fans who continue to be left out in the cold with no games, the positive trade-off is that hopefully there will be no poisoning of the talks through the spin departments."

Remember, the last time the two sides met, Gary Bettman ended up taking "make whole" payments and other offers off the table. So who knows what will be brought to this session -- it could be a resumption of the talks that were going so well before blowing up. It could be an entirely new offer from one side or the other.

The only certainty is the clock -- there continues to be speculation that there's still time to make a deal. Obviously, that's not going to last forever.

If this lockout metaphorically ends in a tie with no deal, everybody loses.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.12.2012 646229 New York Rangers

NHL lockout benefits NY Rangers as it gives forwards Marian Gaborik, Carl Hagelin and newly-acquired Rick Nash time to heal from injuries

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

If there is a silver lining to the lockout for the Rangers, it is that they will have a healthy Marian Gaborik back when - or if - an NHL season begins.

Howard Simmons/New York Daily News

If there is a silver lining to the lockout for the Rangers, it is that they will have a healthy Marian Gaborik back when - or if - an NHL season begins.

If the NHL opens its season in January, the Rangers' previously ailing big guns will be healthy and ready to rock.

Marian Gaborik (offseason shoulder surgery), Rick Nash (aggravated groin) and Carl Hagelin (shoulder) all would be available for an early-January training camp and start to the season, the Daily News has learned.

Nash (HC Davos, Switzerland) and Hagelin (Sodertalje SK, Sweden) sustained injuries while playing in Europe during the lockout but have returned to the United States to rehabilitate. Hagelin has been back since early November. Nash returned late last week.

Due to the lockout, which reached its 87th day on Tuesday, Nash still has not played a game in a Rangers uniform since arriving in a blockbuster July 23 trade from Columbus for Brandon Dubinsky, Artem Anisimov, Tim Erixon and a first-round pick. Gaborik, the Blueshirts' leading returning goal scorer,

had surgery for a torn labrum on June 6 but has had more time than anticipated to heal.

Swiss club Rapperswil-Jona also announced Tuesday that defenseman Michael Del Zotto was returning to New York to have a back injury checked out. But the injury is not expected to be serious.

Talks between the NHL and its players' association blew up last week, but on Monday the parties announced they will resume negotiations on Wednesday at an undisclosed location with a federal mediator present.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly confirmed on Tuesday what he had told the Daily News on Monday: that no owners will attend the next collective bargaining meeting.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646230 New York Rangers

Marian Gaborik, Rick Nash, Carl Hagelin all would be ready to play for NY Rangers if NHL opens in early January

By Pat Leonard

If the NHL opens its season in January, the Rangers' big guns will be healthy and ready to rock.

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Nash (HC Davos, Switzerland) and Hagelin (Sodertalje SK, Sweden) sustained injuries while playing in Europe during the lockout but have returned to the New York area to rehabilitate. Hagelin has been back since early November. Nash returned to the U.S. late last week.

Nash still has not played a game in a Rangers uniform due to the lockout since arriving in a blockbuster July 23 trade for Brandon Dubinsky, Artem Anisimov, Tim Erixon and a first-round pick.

Gaborik, the Blueshirts' leading returning goalscorer, had June 6 surgery for a torn labrum but has had time to rehabilitate due to the extended work stoppage. He did some rehab work in Slovakia but has spent a significant amount of time recently in New York.

On Tuesday, Swiss club Rapperswil-Jona announced that defenseman Michael Del Zotto was returning to New York to have a back injury checked out. The injury is not expected to be serious.

Ryan McDonagh spent about a month with Barys-Astana of the KHL before returning to the U.S. on Nov. 20 and is healthy. Derek Stepan (KalPa, Finland) is still playing overseas.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646231 New York Rangers

NHL and NHLPA resuming negotiations with federal mediator present Wednesday at undisclosed location

By Pat Leonard

The NHL and its players' association will resume negotiations Wednesday at an undisclosed location and have agreed to involve a federal mediator, in their latest attempt to save the 2012-13 season following Monday's cancellation of all games through Dec. 30.

Mediation already failed two weeks ago, and federal mediators have no power to impose a deal, only to make suggestions. But the union pushed for mediators to get involved last week, and though the NHL resisted then, clearly they both now feel that at this point, it can't hurt.

Bill Daly told the Daily News in an email Monday that he doesn't anticipate owners will attend the next collective bargaining meeting, so the NHL's

contingent is expected to include deputy commissioner Daly, commissioner Gary Bettman and attorney Bob Batterman.

The NHL players' association will send executive director Don Fehr, special counsel Steve Fehr, an unknown number of players that at least should include the Winnipeg Jets' Ron Hainsey, and a few lawyers.

Daly told the Ottawa Sun that the location is remaining undisclosed because media attention is not conducive to the negotiation process. The NHLPA told CSN Philly that there will be no media scrums at the undisclosed location. But of course, we have a history of turning undisclosed locations into disclosed ones.

A Daily News breakdown of the remaining issues separating the NHL and union indicates the parties are closer to a deal than last Thursday's blowup indicated. But do not underestimate the NHL's and owners' resentment for Don Fehr, and their frustrations' ability to impede progress.

ESPN's Pierre LeBrun first reported the NHL and union would be meeting on Wednesday on Twitter late Monday night.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646232 New York Rangers

Lockout leaves this goalie throne for loss

By HENRIK LUNDQVIST

Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist spent a couple of days in New York this week before returning home to Gothenburg, Sweden, where he has spent the NHL lockout.

Before catching his flight yesterday, The King expressed his thoughts and emotions to the Post's Larry Brooks.

I HAVE to admit, I was so excited on Tuesday when I walked past the Garden and got my first look at it in a long, long time.

So many different thoughts went through my head. I was thinking about how I missed being there, how frustrating it's been not to be able to play and be with my teammates and in front of our fans.

Everything I was thinking came back to the lockout. That's how it is every day with almost everything. Everything comes back to the lockout. It just makes me upset. The more I think about it, the more upset I am.

I can't even remember the last time I've been away from hockey as long as I have been now. It feels so strange. Everything is off. Nothing is the way it's supposed to be. It's hard to imagine that it's almost Christmas but the season hasn't even started yet.

I miss it so much. I miss the game. I miss the excitement. I miss the challenge of pushing myself every day. I feed off competing. I feed off the energy.

I've tried to be positive. I have to admit that I never thought we would be out this long. I've never gone through anything like this before. The first couple of weeks were weird but then when I realized we might be out for a long time, I started to freak out a little bit. It's hard to explain.

You feed off the game. It's your life. I never imagined it would be this difficult for me not to play and how much I would miss it. I guess you take it for granted that you will always play.

It's really hard for a lot of people to understand this. I don't expect people to understand. Sometimes it's hard for us to understand.

It was good at first to be able to go home with [my wife] Therese and have the chance for [my five-month old daughter] Charlise to say hi for the first time to everyone in our family and our friends. That's the only good thing about this. But as much as Therese and I enjoy home, we miss New York. That's where we should be now.

Coming back a couple of weeks ago and playing in the charity game at Atlantic City was the best I have felt in a long time. I had no idea what to expect, but it felt so good to be out there playing a game.

Of course it wasn't just playing a game, it was the reason we were playing — to help raise money for the recovery from Hurricane Sandy — that also

made it special. It's so inspiring to see how everyone works so hard — and I don't mean the hockey players — to help other people in need.

It was a great night. I loved every minute of it.

When I went past the Garden I thought about the excitement our fans bring that makes it so special. I know the fans are really upset, and they have a right to be. They deserve better. I really mean that. They are so loyal. They spend so much money for tickets and merchandise and to be there to support the team.

The fans deserve better. The game of hockey deserves better. I can't even express how much I hope we're back playing very, very soon.

I can't wait to be in a Rangers uniform again.

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646233 NHL

Malcom Subban emerging from his brother's shadow to be 'an elite guy'

By Eric Duhatschek

P.K.'s kid brother favourite to be the starter for Canada

The shadow of his older brother, the larger-than-life P.K. Subban, is never far from Malcolm Subban these days. Here is P.K., doing television commercials for Nike and public-service announcements for Hyundai Hockey Helpers. There is P.K., doing promos for TSN and posting a humorous video job résumé on the CBC, seeking employment to alleviate his boredom during the NHL lockout.

Ask P.K. Subban a question about his life and times and generally you get a manifesto for an answer. This is a good thing, by the way. He's a charmer, enthusiastic, boisterous and by trade a defenceman, which is the other thing that sets him apart from his younger brother.

Malcolm plays goal and has since switching to the position as a 12-year-old. As recently as 2009, he went in the 11th round, 218th overall, to the Belleville Bulls in the Ontario Hockey League's bantam draft. But three years later, the Boston Bruins made him a first-round NHL draft choice and this week, he is one of four goalies trying out for Canada's world junior hockey team and the favourite to become the starter.

There is a confidence in Malcolm Subban, but it doesn't ooze out the way it does with his brother. Both seem to have fun on the ice, and in that way, he and P.K. are a lot alike.

Subban, Jake Paterson (Saginaw), Jordan Binnington (Owen Sound) and Laurent Broissoit (Edmonton) are all in the running for three places on the 23-man roster. Two will play in the tournament, which starts Dec. 26 in Ufa, Russia, and the third will be the designated alternate, able to play only if one of the others is injured.

Pressure is something goaltenders deal with at every level, but it may be greater at the world junior championship than anywhere else because of their relative inexperience. According to goalie coach Ron Tugnutt, it is harder still for Canadian junior goalies because of the greater expectations here

"We play against a European team that wins a semi-final game and they're excited because they're getting at least a silver medal," Tugnutt said. "We win that game and we're thinking one thing, 'we're only here for gold.' So there's a lot more pressure on our goalie than on the other teams.

"The good thing is, I feel comfortable with all four of these guys and very comfortable with their abilities. They all believe they should be the starter. I think we're pretty lucky to have these four guys here."

Subban says channelling pressure is something that comes naturally to him, and "it helps everyone just to know you can be laidback and not put too much pressure on yourself. I like to have fun. It's not good to put too much pressure on yourself. It depends on how you are. Some guys are good like that. I'm not. I like to just be relaxed and have fun on the ice."

If anything, Subban's biggest challenge is "staying focused, staying within the game," Tugnutt said. "At times, he might kind of stray away and get a little too flamboyant, but you constantly bring him in. He's an elite guy."

Paterson, of Mississauga, was also chosen in the 2012 NHL entry draft, in the third round by the Detroit Red Wings. He may not be as well known as the others in camp, but according to Tugnutt, he has been "a proven winner his whole life. He took over the job in Saginaw last year and led them to a playoff spot and then upset a heavily favoured Sarnia team. He is extremely competitive. His compete level is off the charts."

As is Paterson's ability to handle pressure.

Asked if pressure was something he handled naturally, or a talent he developed along the way, Paterson answered: "It's a bit of both. Being a goaltender, it's a pressure kind of position. Going through the different age groups and into the OHL, there's a lot of pressure on goaltenders every night and there's obviously a higher level of pressure here, coming into camp. But I think I'm used to it."

Canada's goaltending has come under scrutiny since it last won a gold medal, in 2009, but Tugnutt believes that is about to change – and predicts that the pipeline is full of high-end prospects.

"Our [born in] 1994 group is good and our '95 group is off the charts," Tugnutt said. "I just believe we went through a little bit of a phase there. We weren't getting what people would say is the goaltending that we needed or got on most occasions in this tournament.

"But I look back and say, 'it's funny you're saying that, but it seems like the other team is pulling their goalies too. The U.S., in the final game [of 2010], pulled their guy. The Russians pulled their guy [in 2012], and we're doing the same thing.' "So don't tell me that everybody else is better than ours. That's not the case."

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646234 NHL

NHL, union to resume CBA talks Wednesday at undisclosed location

By DAVID EBNER

Sides agree to first meeting since talks went off the rails last week

After the "emotional frenzy" of last week – in the unusually emotive words of NHL commissioner Gary Bettman – the league and the NHL Players' Association will once more convene Wednesday, to slog towards a possible deal, again aided by two federal U.S. mediators.

The urgency, hope and chaos of three days of talks last week, direct negotiations between players and owners, has receded to something of an icy calm.

The sides have not been closer to near-full agreement, yet the NHL still dismissively rejects the idea a deal is tangibly close at hand. Union chief Don Fehr insists the two sides are close.

The Wednesday meeting, between union representatives and some players, and Bettman and his staff, is set for an undisclosed location.

Reporters are expressly unwelcome.

Whether keeping the talks covert and away from prying glares produces any tangible progress is unclear. Whether mediation, round 2, will help is also unclear. It was a total failure two weeks ago, which propelled many to despair that the 2012-13 season was near death.

The owners made a rare concession to players, by agreeing to more mediation – after Bettman last Thursday said he had "no interest" in mediation and described it of "no value." (The mediators are from the Washington-based Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, where Scot Beckenbaugh is deputy director and knows the NHL well, having been in ultimately failed talks in 2004-05, and again two weeks ago. Director of mediation services John Sweeney is the other mediator.)

Wednesday marks Day 88 of the lockout and with games cancelled through Dec. 30, there isn't any particular urgency to bang out of a deal immediately.

If a season does occur, something of a consensus percolated this week that a schedule would be 48 games, and possibly 54, with pucks to drop in early January.

While the sides have settled mostly settled issues around money, the remaining questions, such as the length of the collective agreement and player contracts, are still major hurdles.

One underlying issue is that of perspective. The owners believe they have yielded great ground, even though it is the owners who have hammered the players down to 50 per cent of revenue from their previous take of 57 per cent. Last Thursday night, the owner of the Pittsburgh Penguins Ron Burkle, painted as a friend of labour, stated: "We made substantial movement on our end quickly, but unfortunately that was not met with the same level of movement from the other side."

So, as always in negotiations, tone and perspective will be crucial.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, in an e-mail to The Canadian Press on Tuesday, said he carried "no expectations" as the sides readied to reconvene.

The players expressed a generic positive view. "It's good they're talking and, hopefully, something good comes out of it," Pittsburgh Penguins captain Sidney Crosby told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Tuesday.

Among management, Vancouver Canucks assistant general manager Laurence Gilman said Tuesday he was "hopeful" a deal could get done. He spoke about his desire to get players back on the ice – and also of the particular challenges of a shortened season, where injuries and the like can wreak havoc.

"I feel we are as close today as we were a season-and-a-half ago, and I feel like time is slipping away for us," Gilman told Team 1040 radio in Vancouver.

"It'll be a sprint for sure," he said of a potential shortened season. "If we're only playing a 50-game season, there's a lot more bad things that can happen."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.12.2012

646235 NHL

Scanlan: Finally some meaningful hockey

by Wayne Scanlan

Win or lose, the world juniors nearly always capture the hearts of this hockey nation.

Teenage rock stars on TSN's holiday sports viewing stage.

Rarely, though, is a Canadian team so assured of seizing our full attention — perhaps even prompting alarm clocks to go off at ungodly hours.

While the NHL continues to stumble around in the dark, about to meet for another round of CBA talks at some "undisclosed location," a loaded, lockout-fuelled Canadian junior camp took to the ice in Calgary for the first time on Tuesday.

Real hockey players, preparing for meaningful games. What a concept.

Fans are as hungry to see this team as this team is to get going.

With NHL games cancelled through Dec. 30, the juniors figure to have the hockey spotlight to themselves, perhaps through the entire tournament, Dec. 26-Jan. 5. Even with a sudden CBA agreement, the earliest the NHL could begin play is Dec. 31, and Team Canada certainly owns the morning of New's Year Eve, regardless of NHL developments by then.

Where else to be but in front of the TV set when Canada meets Russia at 9 a.m. Eastern Time on Dec. 31 in Ufa, Russia.

Thanks to the NHL's stalemate, a host of players that might otherwise be unavailable to the junior program will be dressed in Canadian colours for the 2013 world junior event.

That includes Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who has already dazzled NHL fans in his rookie season for the Edmonton Oilers, and yet is thrilled to take a step down to the U20 ranks to get his first taste of world junior action. Others who might not be here if the NHL was in business: Jonathan Huberdeau of the Florida Panthers; Ryan Strome of the Carolina Hurricanes; Mark Scheifele, the future Winnipeg Jet who has visited Ottawa many times as a member of the OHL Barrie Colts, Dougie Hamilton, the Boston Bruins prospect, Ryan Murphy, the Carolina Hurricanes 12th overall pick; Griffin Reinhart, taken fourth overall by the New York Islanders in 2012 and Morgan Rielly, the fifth overall pick in the same draft, by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Already a superstar line has emerged, at least in the early skates: Nugent-Hopkins at centre between Scheifele (shifted to wing from centre) and Huberdeau, also a natural centre. It's that kind of year for Canada — forming a line that could double as a power play unit.

That four of the players cited above — Hamilton, Reinhart, Murphy and Rielly — are defencemen helps explain why some are calling this group potentially the best blueline corps Canada has assembled for the world junior tournament (but let's save the superlatives until the job is complete).

And yet, it was still a surprise that 6-foot-3 defenceman Cody Ceci of the Ottawa 67's, the Senators' 15th overall pick this past summer, didn't at least scoop an invitation to camp.

The 67's are represented in Calgary by Sean Monahan and Tyler Graovac — the pair skated on the same forward line Tuesday.

One of the OHL's hottest scorers in the early weeks of the season, Graovac, a Minnesota Wild pick, has 18 goals in 24 games. Monahan, 18, is rated as a high first round pick next summer, but in Calgary has to try to beat out older, more experienced players — always highly valued in this tournament.

For now, he's just glad to be back competing. Due to a 10-game suspension for an illegal bodycheck, Monahan hasn't played a game since Nov. 20. Already, head coach Steve Spott is raving about Monahan's NHL-level hockey sense.

Of course, Monahan is a grizzled veteran compared to heralded Haligonian Nathan MacKinnon, 17, a second-year QMJHL player for the Halifax Mooseheads. MacKinnon and his Mooseheads teammate Jonathan Drouin, also 17, are two more draft-eligible players trying to beat the odds by grabbing a spot on the Canadian roster.

Boston Bruins prospect Malcolm Subban is expected to start in goal for Canada. The brother of Montreal Canadiens defenceman P.K. Subban, M. Subban has the rare advantage of being an OHL goaltender accustomed to the tricky angles and optics of the international ice, as the Belleville Bulls regularly practice and play on the big ice at the Yardmen Arena.

The 36 invited players held their first practice Tuesday morning. The first scrimmage was to be held in the evening, as coach Spott and team administrators began the process of whittling the group down to 23 for the trip to Russia.

Soon enough, we'll find out how devoted Canadian fans are to their juniors. With the 11-hour time difference between Ufa and Eastern Canada, games will be broadcast at odd hours (with repeat broadcasts, of course). Canada's first three games are at 4:30 a.m., Dec. 26 vs. Germany, Dec. 28 vs. Slovakia and Dec. 30 vs. the USA. The gold medal game is at 8 a.m. Jan. 5.

This is the first time in five years the tournament is being played outside of North America. Canada last won gold in 2009, when the event was held in

Ottawa, Jordan Eberle and John Tavares worked their magic, and a packed Scotiabank Place audience looked on in awe.

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646236 NHL

Juniors line up big guns on opening day of Canadian camp

By Kristen Odland, Postmedia News December 11, 2012

CALGARY -- It's a little early to determine line combinations for Team Canada, but there was plenty of buzz over the top trio on Team Red in Hockey Canada's national junior selection camp's opening session on Tuesday.

Onlookers saw Edmonton Oilers centreman Ryan Nugent-Hopkins with Jonathan Huberdeau on his left wing and Mark Scheifele on his right.

Scheifele, like Nugent-Hopkins, normally lines up at centre, but had been informed of the potential position swap before arriving in Calgary and was given instructions with his Ontario Hockey League club, the Barrie Colts, to work on specific drills.

"We were working on getting the puck out, chipping pucks out, hitting the centreman, feeling what it's like to have D pressure you when you pinch down the wall," Scheifele said following Tuesday morning's session. "Playing centre, you have a lot more defensive responsibility down low compared to the wing, where you're up high blocking shots."

He'll take it, of course, if it means being on a line with Huberdeau and Nugent-Hopkins.

"I just keep telling those guys to communicate with me," said the Winnipeg Jets 2011 first-round draft pick, who played in seven games with the club last fall. "I think it's an easy transition, I just have to work hard at it. I tried it for a few practices when I was with Winnipeg last year. Everyone says it's not too tough, though. When they called me about the selection camp, they talked to me about playing the wing. There are just different responsibilities."

The 2013 world juniors begin Dec. 26 in Ufa, Russia.

BLAZER LIKES HIS FIT

J.C. Lipon, the WHL's leading scorer, is considered a dark horse to make the squad as an undrafted 19-year-old. But Tuesday, he found himself on the right wing alongside Halifax Mooseheads stars Nathan MacKinnon and Jonathan Drouin -- a position that would make anyone jealous.

MacKinnon, who is projected to go first overall at the 2013 NHL draft, and Drouin, also a highly touted 2013 prospect, are both fast, skilled and can put the puck in the net.

"It's like, 'Oh, you're playing with two 17-year-olds.' But they're unreal," said Lipon, who was being watched by his Kamloops Blazers teammates who are in town to play the Calgary Hitmen. "You pass to them and they're there. They're pretty fast dudes. I am just going to take the body and hopefully get open and they'll find me."

Tuesday's morning session was well-attended by the NHL-lockout starved media -- which took Lipon by surprise.

"Seeing all the people in the stands, it's kind of nerve-racking," he said. "It was fun. Cool. Fast-paced out there. Guys were huffing and puffing because of the Alberta altitude. Obviously, it's your first time out there. A little weird, a little shaky. But once you get out there, everyone kind of complements each other and it's fun."

KNIGHT AND DAY

Scott Harrington left the London Knights with mixed feelings.

On one hand, the 19-year-old Knights captain and a Canadian world junior veteran defenceman from last year's team, returned to Calgary for the national team selection camp -- a thrilling process that he'll go through for a second time around this year.

On the other hand, his OHL club is rolling with an impressive franchise-tying 18-game win streak.

Harrington had arrived Monday after chipping in for victory No. 18, a 5-2 win over the Mississauga Steelheads.

"It's kind of unfortunate we didn't start earlier so I would have been there to help them break the record," said the Pittsburgh Penguins draft pick, who went 54th overall in 2011. "But it's exciting to be here at camp.

"I'm obviously very confident with the way the season has gone for myself and my team so far."

In some ways, Harrington said, it was tough to leave the Knights (26-5-0-2), who currently lead the OHL with a healthy 54 points.

"It's been great," said the reliable blueliner, who has a goal and eight assists and is a plus-9 in 33 games for the Knights. "We started winning some games and didn't really think of trying to put together a streak, but the month of November was kind to us and we kept winning.

"It's unfortunate timing, I guess, in a way. But I'm excited to be here, for sure."

NET GAINS

Early into his junior hockey career, Jordan Binnington was tested on the big stage.

He was just a few months shy of his 18th birthday when he went to the Memorial Cup with the Owen Sound Attack, where he was named the top goalie of the 2011 tournament in Mississauga, Ont.

And Binnington, a St. Louis Blues draft pick, is using that to his advantage heading into this week's selection camp, where he's up against fellow OHL goalies Malcolm Subban of the Belleville Bulls and Jake Paterson of the Saginaw Spirit, along with Laurent Brossoit of the WHL's Edmonton Oil Kings.

"You see everything a little bit differently with experience under your belt," said Binnington, who has a 17-6-1-2 record with a 2.31 goals-against average and 0.930 save percentage with the Attack this year. "Over the years, I've had some great leaders teach me the ways, I guess.

"And from what I've seen, you've just got to stick to your game plan and stay composed."

Canadian head coach Steve Spott has seen a lot of Binnington over the years as the coach of the OHL's Kitchener Rangers. However, he's relatively new to Hockey Canada's radar.

"I've never really gotten an opportunity like this to represent your country," he said. "Things have been going well this year. I didn't get invited to the Canada-Russia series this summer, but (Hockey Canada goaltending coach) Ron Tugnutt was saying the most important camp to make is this one

"So I'm here, I'm ready, and hopefully it goes well."

Although two jobs are technically up for grabs -- and likely, one starting job -- Hockey Canada is taking three goaltenders to Russia for emergency purposes.

Not only are they judging performances during the short camp, team brass also need to determine which goalie is the right fit for the group.

"If you're selected as the third guy, it's still an honour," said Binnington. "You have to be a cheerleader, I guess you'd say. You've gotta be ready though and keep battling. I'm going in here, looking for the No. 1 job. That's what everyone wants.

"You just have to make the best of your opportunity, you know?"

EXPERIENCE COUNTS

Hockey Canada truly thinks of everything, including strategic hotel roommate assignments based on age, ability and experience.

Hence the reason they paired together Nugent-Hopkins, who went first overall to the Oilers in 2011, with MacKinnon, who is projected to go first overall in 2013.

"The one thing we try to cover off is all of the details," said Spott. "On and off the ice. When we put our rooming list together, it's getting guys together and making sure they're compatable.

"Obviously for players like Nathan MacKinnon and Jonathan Drouin, there's a lot of pressure on those young guys. Those are two young men that have unique experiences.

"I think if there's someone that could lend some advice to Nathan, it would be Ryan."

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646237 NHL

Goalie Subban brings perfect shootout mark to Canada's junior camp

By Brenda Branswell, Postmedia News December 11, 2012

When 36 players hit the ice on Tuesday for the three-day national junior team selection camp in Calgary, one of the interesting sub-plots will be what happens in goal.

Malcolm Subban from the Belleville Bulls in the Ontario Hockey League is one of four newcomers battling for a goaltending spot on Canada's team for the world junior championship that kicks off on Boxing Day in Ufa, Russia.

Some observers speculate that Subban, the Boston Bruins first-round draft pick last June, has an early edge for the starting job. The other goalies challenging for a spot are Jordan Binnington and Jake Paterson, also from the OHL, and Laurent Brossoit who plays for the Edmonton Oil Kings in the Western Hockey League.

"Obviously you hear a lot of stuff but at the end of the day ... I'm only thinking about what I control and that's playing well," Subban said in an interview on the weekend. "So I don't put too much pressure on myself."

Hockey Canada plans to name three goalies to the team because it would take too long to bring in a replacement goalie, if needed, to Russia because of the distance. The roster will be announced on Thursday night.

Subban, who turns 19 next week, got his start in hockey as a defence-man - the position played by brothers P.K., the popular Canadiens blue-liner, and Jordan, his teammate on the Bulls - before switching to goal.

He backstopped the national junior team in its two victories in last August's Canada-Russia Challenge, a series that Hockey Canada called the first step in identifying players for Canada's team for the world junior championship, which will be played on the larger international ice surface.

Subban is accustomed to playing on a bigger surface. The Bulls are the only OHL team with an Olympic-size rink.

Subban likes to challenge shooters and is patient at the same time, said Sébastien Farrese, the Bulls' goalie coach.

"So that's why I think he has so much success in a shootout. He's never lost a shootout in $2\frac{1}{2}$ years."

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646238 NHL

NHL lockout: Owners, players call in mediators again as talks set to resume

Mark Zwolinski

NHL owners and players are set to resume negotiations in their labour standoff on Wednesday, with a faint air of optimism that hockey will return in the new year.

The league and its players' union will return to the table at an undisclosed location, but they won't be going it alone. U.S. federal mediators Scott Beckenbaugh and John Sweeney — who first tried to bridge the gap between the two sides on Nov. 27 and 28 — will be rejoining the process.

The NHLPA continued to push for mediation when players and owners gathered in New York last week and the NHL eventually agreed. However,

deputy commissioner Bill Daly acknowledged Tuesday that he would carry "no expectations" into the next session.

MORE:NHL lockout coverage

Both sides remain dug in on three essential issues — the length of a new collective bargaining agreement, rules governing term limits on contracts and the transition rules to help teams get under the salary cap — and Wednesday's talks will be a test to see if any goodwill remains from the roller-coaster sessions in New York last week.

Those talks, between a select group of owners and players absent the presence of commissioner Gary Bettman and union leader Donald Fehr, began with a good news Tuesday, the first appreciable progress during the lockout. They were followed Wednesday with a complete collapse of that goodwill, every achievement being as taken off the table in what many referred to as the Manhattan Meltdown.

After that breakdown, long-time observers said Bettman was as livid as they've ever seen him, while Fehr has continued to maintain that the two sides are in agreement, or close to it, on all significant issues.

"My comments from a couple of days ago stand on their own," Fehr said in a speech to the Canadian Auto Workers on Saturday. "I think we were very close."

It's a certainty the players are dug in on contract length of eight years or longer, as opposed to the five-year length offered by the league. The players claim a contract of eight to 10 years with an average salary of \$7 million (for an elite player) would leave more cap space for lower-level players than, say, a five-year contract where elite players could earn \$12 million per season.

The players are also wary of a five-year limit on free-agent contracts — seven years if the player re-signs with his team. That, they say, would limit player movement in free agency since the home club could offer two years more than any other team.

The lockout hit Day 87 on Tuesday and has already resulted in the cancellation of 526 regular-season games through Dec. 30, plus the Winter Classic and all-star game.

With files from The Canadian Press

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.12.2012

646239 NHL

NHL going into next round of lockout talks with 'no expectations': Bill Daly

Chris Johnston, Canadian Press | Dec 11, 2012 4:04 PM ET | Last Updated: Dec 11, 2012 7:00 PM ET

TORONTO — After watching negotiations go off the rails in a very public setting last week, the NHL and NHL Players' Association are heading back underground.

And they've invited some company.

The sides are set to resume talks at an undisclosed location Wednesday with U.S. federal mediators Scot L. Beckenbaugh and John Sweeney rejoining the process. Those men first met with league and union leaders Nov. 27 and 28 before deciding they couldn't help negotiations along.

The NHLPA continued to push for mediation when players and owners gathered in New York last week and the NHL eventually agreed. However, deputy commissioner Bill Daly acknowledged Tuesday that he would carry "no expectations" into the next session.

Some traction was made during the last round of negotiations when owners and players met directly — commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr were both kept out of the room — although talks broke down in spectacular fashion shortly after Fehr met reporters on Thursday night and announced that agreements had been reached on most of the main issues.

Even though the NHL subsequently rejected the union's offer and pulled its own off the table, the NHLPA leader stuck by his comments when he spoke to the Canadian Auto Workers in Toronto over the weekend.

"My comments from a couple of days ago stand on their own," Fehr said Saturday. "I think we were very close."

The biggest change since the sides last met with mediators is the NHL's willingness to increase the amount of deferred make-whole payments to US\$300 million — a jump of \$89 million from what had previously been on the table. The league also dropped proposed changes to rules governing unrestricted free agency, arbitration and entry-level contracts while the NHLPA began entertaining the introduction of term limits on deals and increasing the overall length of the CBA.

In short, they moved closer together during three up-and-down days of negotiations and the mediators will rejoin the process at a more progressed stage than they left it.

Non-binding mediation has been used by the NFL and NBA during recent work stoppages without success. The Washington-based Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service was also involved during the lockout that cancelled the 2004-05 NHL season, with Beckenbaugh attending sessions back then as well.

It's an interesting question, because if we were so close [to a deal] why would we need mediation?

As recently as last week, Bettman indicated that he didn't think mediators would be able to help bridge the gap in negotiations and questioned why the union continued to ask for their presence after claiming a deal was at hand.

"We're not interested in mediation," Bettman said Thursday. "We went through it a week and a half ago. It was of no value because of the position of the parties. When the mediators weren't available this week, we did what we felt was our own informal mediation in terms of trying to move the process forward, giving where we could.

"It's an interesting question, because if we were so close (to a deal) why would we need mediation?"

From the league's point of view, three main issues remain in negotiations: the length of the CBA, rules governing term limits on contracts and the transition rules to help teams get under the salary cap.

There are also a handful of secondary issues that have yet to be agreed upon, including the continued participation of NHLers in the Olympics, the international calendar and rules governing drug testing.

The lockout hit Day 87 on Tuesday and has already resulted in the cancellation of 526 regular-season games through Dec. 30, plus the Winter Classic and all-star game. With the window to save the season narrowing, there was hope the two sides might be in a position to continue working through their differences.

"It's good they're talking and hopefully something good comes out of it," Penguins captain Sidney Crosby told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Tuesday.

National Post LOADED: 12.12.2012

646240 NHL

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins looking for leadership role in world juniors debut

Donna Spencer, Canadian Press | Dec 11, 2012 8:30 AM ET | Last Updated: Dec 11, 2012 10:22 AM ET

CALGARY — Once again, an NHL lockout is creating unexpected benefits for Canada's junior hockey team.

Edmonton Oilers forward Ryan Nugent-Hopkins arrived in Calgary on Monday for the junior team's selection camp.

He's already played for Canada in the men's world hockey championship this year, but the NHL lockout means the 19-year-old will get to play in the world junior championship for the first time in his career.

That also occurred during the NHL lockout of 2004-05, when Boston Bruins forward Patrice Bergeron was named the most valuable player of the 2005 junior tournament in Grand Forks, N.D., after helping Canada win gold at the 2004 world championship in Prague.

Nugent-Hopkins has a full NHL season behind him in which he was a finalist for the Calder Trophy that goes to the league's top rookie. The Oilers didn't make him available to the Canadian team that won bronze at the 2012 world junior championship in Alberta.

Now, two years after he was cut from Canada's junior team at age 17, Nugent-Hopkins is expected to lead it into the tournament starting Dec. 26 in Ufa. Russia.

"I've got to try to take on more of a leadership role this year," Nugent-Hopkins said Monday at the Calgary airport. "As a 17-year-old, I couldn't come into camp and do that. I'm definitely going to try and take some experience from worlds and bring it to this camp here.

I'm definitely going to try and take some experience from worlds and bring it to this camp here

"I feel like I'm a different person than I was a couple of years ago. My game has definitely evolved a lot and I see myself more as a two-way player right now so I'm definitely going to try and take on that role at this camp."

Since Nugent-Hopkins brings hockey experience to this Canadian team no other players have, Hockey Canada's expectations of him are high.

"He's a special player," Hockey Canada head scout Kevin Prendergast said. "For a young man to step into the National Hockey League and do exactly what he did last year, he brings high energy with him, he's offensively gifted and he makes everybody on the ice a better hockey player.

Jeff McIntosh/The Canadian Press

"From that standpoint, it can't help but help us."

The 36 players invited to this year's selection camp streamed through the Calgary airport Monday. Nugent-Hopkins arrived on a flight with Edmonton Oil Kings goaltender Laurent Brossoit and defenceman Griffin Reinhart.

The players get on the ice Tuesday at Canada Olympic Park and the 23-player team will be chosen by Thursday. The invitees will play an intrasquad game Tuesday followed by games against university players the following two days.

The Oilers confirmed on the weekend Nugent-Hopkins was available for selection camp before the NHL's announcement Monday that the cancellation of games has been extended to Dec. 30.

Nugent-Hopkins was included on the camp roster announced a week earlier, but there was some question about the health of his shoulder, even though he'd been playing for the American Hockey League's Oklahoma City Barons this season.

"It was just something we really needed to take care of and we definitely did in the past week," Nugent-Hopkins said. "I felt like I really strengthened it."

It's one of those unique situations that doesn't happen too often. I'm excited to take advantage of it

The six-foot, 185-pound centre from Burnaby, B.C., is the lone NHL player available to Canada, although second-year Canadian players such as Jonathan Huberdeau (Florida), Mark Scheifele (Winnipeg), Ryan Strome (N.Y. Islanders) and defenceman Dougie Hamilton (Boston) would likely have been in the NHL this season.

"There's a lot of guys going to this camp that probably would be with their NHL clubs already right now," Nugent-Hopkins said. "It's one of those unique situations that doesn't happen too often. I'm excited to take advantage of it."

Nugent-Hopkins had four goals and two assists in eight games at this year's world championship held jointly in Stockholm, Sweden, and Helsinki, Finland, where Canada finished fifth. He totalled 18 goals and 34 assists in 62 NHL games last season.

Colleen De Neve/Postmedia News

"He's such a tremendous player," said Prince Albert Raiders forward Mark McNeill, who was cut from the team last year and is back for another try.

"Being able to have him come down from the pro ranks and help out the world junior team this year is really going to help."

Saginaw Spirit goaltender Jake Paterson is one of four goaltenders vying for two jobs at selection camp, although the Canadian team is planning to take a third goalie to Russia as insurance against injury. He also anticipates testing himself against Nugent-Hopkins during camp.

"Yeah, exactly, it's always a good experience to take some shots from an NHLer," Paterson said. "Having Nugent-Hopkins shoot on me will be good for my development."

National Post LOADED 12.12.2012

646241 NHL

What to expect from the NHL lockout in the next few weeks

Sean McIndoe | Dec 11, 2012 7:00 AM ET | Last Updated: Dec 11, 2012 9:30 AM ET

There's no denying that last week's dramatic breakdown in negotiations between the NHL and NHLPA was bad news for hockey fans holding out hope for a partial season. After a bizarre Thursday session that left Don Fehr shaking his head and Gary Bettman shaking in anger, it feels like we're closer than ever to writing off the 2012-13 season completely.

But despite all the doom and gloom, observers kept reminding us of one positive: there's still time. While we don't know when the season would be cancelled, most experts agree we should have another four weeks or so before doomsday.

Will that be enough time? Nobody knows. Here's a look at how those next few weeks might play out.

Dec. 14 Gary Bettman makes a proposal to the NHLPA that he swears is the league's best and final offer, and everyone believes him because he'd certainly never lie about something like that.

Dec. 17 The two sides find common ground for the first time in months when everyone in the room is able to agree that Steve Fehr's sweaters are starting to get ridiculous.

Dec. 20 Your children are disappointed to find out that the man with the long straggly beard and the big jiggly belly sitting by himself at the mall is actually just an NHL player who didn't bother to find a job in Europe.

Dec. 24 The Grinch Who Stole Christmas is fired from his job at Proskauer Rose for not making enough people miserable.

Dec. 25 A nation full of hockey fans wake up hoping to find a new CBA under their tree for Christmas, right up until a sulking Ron Wilson reminds them that contracts from Santa aren't always worth what you'd think they are

Dec. 26 The owners must explain to a disappointed George Parros that while it's nice that he brought his own pair of gloves, that's still not the kind of "boxing day meeting" they meant and he knows it.

Dec. 29 Bettman makes a proposal to the NHLPA that he swears is the league's best and final offer, and everyone believes him because this time he crosses his heart and hopes to die.

Dec. 31 Fehr and Bettman lead the two sides in a marathon bargaining session that stretches to midnight, resulting in the most awkward "Why is everyone looking at us like we're expected to kiss?" New Year's moment of all-time.

Jan. 1 Observers in Times Square are delighted at the ultra-realistic Father Time and Baby New Year performance before realizing that the cranky old man with the crying infant are actually just Jeremy Jacobs and Ryan Miller arguing again.

Jan. 7 Bettman makes a proposal to the NHLPA that he swears is the league's best and final offer, and everyone believes him because he triple stamps it black ball no erasies.

Jan. 11 Advanced theoretical mathematics suggests that this will be the date for a key milestone, as the one billionth "Hey, at least the Maple Leafs are still undefeated" joke of the lockout is made.

Jan. 15 The suspected "drop dead" date for the league, in the sense that it's the day the season will be cancelled if an agreement has not yet been reached.

Jan. 16 The suspected "drop dead" date for the league, in the sense that that's the phrase its dozen remaining fans will be uttering.

National Post LOADED 12.12.2012

646242 NHI

NHL, union to resume CBA talks Wednesday at undisclosed location

DAVID EBNER

After the "emotional frenzy" of last week – in the unusually emotive words of NHL commissioner Gary Bettman – the league and the NHL Players' Association will once more convene Wednesday, to slog towards a possible deal, again aided by two federal U.S. mediators.

The urgency, hope and chaos of three days of talks last week, direct negotiations between players and owners, has receded to something of an icy calm.

The sides have not been closer to near-full agreement, yet the NHL still dismissively rejects the idea a deal is tangibly close at hand. Union chief Don Fehr insists the two sides are close.

The Wednesday meeting, between union representatives and some players, and Bettman and his staff, is set for an undisclosed location.

Reporters are expressly unwelcome.

Whether keeping the talks covert and away from prying glares produces any tangible progress is unclear. Whether mediation, round 2, will help is also unclear. It was a total failure two weeks ago, which propelled many to despair that the 2012-13 season was near death.

The owners made a rare concession to players, by agreeing to more mediation – after Bettman last Thursday said he had "no interest" in mediation and described it of "no value." (The mediators are from the Washington-based Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, where Scot Beckenbaugh is deputy director and knows the NHL well, having been in ultimately failed talks in 2004-05, and again two weeks ago. Director of mediation services John Sweeney is the other mediator.)

Wednesday marks Day 88 of the lockout and with games cancelled through Dec. 30, there isn't any particular urgency to bang out of a deal immediately.

If a season does occur, something of a consensus percolated this week that a schedule would be 48 games, and possibly 54, with pucks to drop in early January.

While the sides have settled mostly settled issues around money, the remaining questions, such as the length of the collective agreement and player contracts, are still major hurdles.

One underlying issue is that of perspective. The owners believe they have yielded great ground, even though it is the owners who have hammered the players down to 50 per cent of revenue from their previous take of 57 per cent. Last Thursday night, the owner of the Pittsburgh Penguins Ron Burkle, painted as a friend of labour, stated: "We made substantial movement on our end quickly, but unfortunately that was not met with the same level of movement from the other side."

So, as always in negotiations, tone and perspective will be crucial.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, in an e-mail to The Canadian Press on Tuesday, said he carried "no expectations" as the sides readied to reconvene.

The players expressed a generic positive view. "It's good they're talking and, hopefully, something good comes out of it," Pittsburgh Penguins captain Sidney Crosby told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Tuesday.

Among management, Vancouver Canucks assistant general manager Laurence Gilman said Tuesday he was "hopeful" a deal could get done. He spoke about his desire to get players back on the ice – and also of the particular challenges of a shortened season, where injuries and the like can wreak havoc.

"I feel we are as close today as we were a season-and-a-half ago, and I feel like time is slipping away for us," Gilman told Team 1040 radio in Vancouver

"It'll be a sprint for sure," he said of a potential shortened season. "If we're only playing a 50-game season, there's a lot more bad things that can happen."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.12.2012

646243 Ottawa Senators

Lockout or not, NHL players will visit CHEO

by Ken Warren

The National Hockey League fans staying at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario are missing out on on-ice action, but they won't be missing the annual visit by NHL players.

Ottawa Senators defenceman Chris Phillips says there have been preliminary talks to have a group of NHL stars visit the hospital at some point during the holiday season.

"It's not planned yet, but it's in the works, so we're trying to find a date," Phillips said following Tuesday's skate with the Carleton University Ravens. "We're thinking about doing the visit and the NHLPA will also help out with some of the logistical stuff."

Typically, a huge Ottawa Senators entourage of management, coaches and players spend an afternoon with the children following a practice at this time of year. Due to the NHL lockout, however, there has been no communication between a team's front office and its players, making a team visit impossible.

Phillips says the visit is always one of the season's highlights.

"To see what those kids are going through and if we can put smiles on their faces, at least for one day, it feels good for us to have the ability to do that," he said

Charities around Ottawa have taken a hit due to the absence of NHL hockey, but if there's one place where NHL owners and players do agree wholeheartedly, it's in trying to help out the less fortunate.

A handful of Ottawa-area players took part in a series of exhibition games in Cornwall, Yellowknife, Inuvik and Whitehorse in November. A star-studded group of NHLers, including Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson, played in Operation Hat Trick, a charity game in Atlantic City to raise funds for those devastated by Hurricane Sandy. In October, NHL stars got together for a game in Chicago, raising more than \$300,000 for Champs For Charity.

Phillips is also an honourary ambassador for Candlelighters, which raises funds for children affected by cancer. The Christmas fundraising event was held Monday at Funhaven in Ottawa's west end.

"It was great, a really good turnout, bringing the families out to have fun, see the toys and Santa," said Phillips.

From the organization side, Senators head coach Paul MacLean and assistant coach Dave Cameron have volunteered at the Ottawa Food Bank. Senators president Cyril Leeder and alumni members Shean Donovan and Jason York helped distribute turkeys at the Ottawa Mission before Thanksgiving.

Senators Foundation president Danielle Robinson, executive vice president/chief financial officer Erin Crowe and the wives of the club's

coaching staff were involved in the Trees of Hope decorating event, which also raises money for CHEO.

MacLean has paid several surprise visits to minor hockey practices and is taking part Wednesday in the official groundbreaking for a permanent outdoor rink at Jules Morin Park in Lowertown. The Senators are partners in the construction of the facility.

For all the fundraising and charity involvement, Phillips says it is difficult to explain the lockout to young Senators fans.

"The easiest answer is that we're kind of, a little bit, in the same boat as them," he said. "We're fans of the game and we want to play. You can't explain a lockout and all that kind of stuff."

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.12.2012

646244 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Roots store removes Leafs merchandise after Senators fans complain

by James Gordon

The National Hockey League may be on a self-imposed hiatus, but the Battle of Ontario is still raging on the retail front.

Earlier this week, an Ottawa Senators fan named Spencer Callaghan noticed a big Toronto Maple Leafs merchandise display — complete with mannequins and a wide variety of clothing — at the company's Bayshore Mall location, with no equivalent for the local team.

Perturbed that the iconic Canadian retailer would so brazenly flaunt said merchandise in an enemy market when he couldn't find a single Sens shirt, he took a picture and attached it to a complaint, later picked up by Senators fan group Red Scarf Union, to the official Roots public relations Twitter account.

Even he was surprised by what happened next.

On Tuesday, the company said via Twitter it would be removing all Leafs goods from its capital locations, pointing out the merchandise was still available on its website and in other stores.

True to its word, there was nary a Leafs logo to be found at the Bayshore store Thursday afternoon, though Roots director of communication Robert Sarner said in an email Tuesday night that the company would in fact continue to sell Leafs goods here.

"In terms of the issue of the Leaf merchandise in our Ottawa stores, there was some confusion earlier (Tuesday) which resulted in a Tweet that went out saying we had pulled the Leaf merchandise from our Ottawa stores," he wrote. "We did instruct the Bayshore location to modify the original display in their store after a few Sens fans perceived (incorrectly) that we favour the Leafs and made certain negative assumptions about us."

Callaghan said an outright ban was over and above anything he expected or wanted anyways.

"The last thing I want is to come across as some whiny Sens fan trying to get something banned," he said. "I just expressed my opinion to Roots. I don't think I even put the Sens hashtag in there. All of a sudden it just blows up.

"I just said, 'hey Roots what's the deal?' It wasn't like a 'hey lets crusade against Roots' thing. I was just shopping for my wife."

Callaghan said he feels the one thing the Senators franchise has failed to do in Ottawa is stick up for itself when Leafs and Habs fans run roughshod over it, and he also rejects the notion that voicing displeasure with what he called "disrespect" amounts to an inferiority complex.

"Red Sox fans would burn the building down if there was a Yankees display like that," he said.

When another customer who disagreed with a ban contacted the @RootsCanada Twitter account to confirm the move, the company

responded: "While we did make the decision to pull product from Ottawa locations, the merch is staying in all other stores and online."

The customer, who described himself as a hockey fan who knows there are a variety of team supporters in any city, was stunned.

"Love Roots merch, but admit I'm astonished by the decision," he wrote back. "So many Leafs fans in Ottawa, now left out in the cold."

Indeed, the Leafs ban would have been a bold move from a business perspective, given a trip to Scotiabank Place for any recent Battle of Ontario game would suggest split loyalties in this town.

Sarner said Roots did hear from the other front Tuesday as well.

"In answer to your last question, yes we have heard from several Leaf fans in Ottawa who say they're glad Roots does sell Leaf merchandise in the capital," he wrote. "Curiously, we traditionally sell more Leaf merchandise in Ottawa than Senator products."

Of course, Senators fans would argue that has more to do with poor selection than team allegiances.

Sometimes in the Battle of Ontario, nobody wins.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.12.2012

646245 Ottawa Senators

No sign of Ottawa Senators' birthday boy Daniel Alfredsson

Leah Larocque, Special to the Sun

Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson decided to celebrate his 40th birthday away from the rink Tuesday, spending the day with his children.

That caught teammate Chris Phillips by surprise. Phillips said he saw Alfredsson Monday night and was expecting him at the Tuesday morning skate at Carleton University.

"I thought I would hear from him and I woke up and got a text from him," said Phillips.

Reading off his phone, Phillips said the text message from Alfredsson was simple: "I was going to go this morning, but then I realized I am not 39 anymore."

Phillips could not say if the rumours of a surprise party were true.

"Obviously, it'll be a surprise to me, too," Phillips said.

The defenceman, meanwhile, was planning to hit the malls.

"I've got Christmas shopping planned for the day. I have had three months and all of a sudden there's 14 days left," Phillips said.

Phillips remained tight-lipped about what he will put under the tree. "I have ideas," he said.

So what does Phillips want for Christmas?

"Health and happiness," he said.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.12.2012

646246 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators will still spread Christmas joy despite NHL lockout, says Chris Phillips

1

Leah Larocque, Special to the Sun

Despite the fact there is no hockey, Senators defenceman Chris Phillips will continue to make spirits brighter this holiday season.

After a morning skate with the Carleton Ravens Tuesday morning, Phillips said he still hopes to visit CHEO before Christmas.

"I don't know who we are going to get to sing this year ... It's a great event," said Phillips, joking he will have to sing louder without the entire Senators roster on hand.

Since no official visits can be planned due to the lockout, players organize their own events. For Phillips, this includes visiting CHEO, which has become something of an annual tradition.

"It's not planned yet, but it is in the works. We are trying to find a date," said Phillips. "Hopefully, before Christmas."

As a veteran, Phillips acknowledged that the responsibility to round up the players might fall on his shoulders.

"I was thinking about doing the visit and the NHLPA will help out with some of the logistics," Phillips, 34, said. "To see what those kids are going through and if we can bring a smile to their face for one day and brighten their lives a little bit, it feels good for us to have the ability to do that."

Aaron Robinson, the Senators' director and fan and community development, said the organization, "continues to try fulfil all our commitments to charities, and CHEO is an important one of those.

"We are continuing to try to support who we supported in the past and even extend ourselves in terms of our commitments to the community," Robinson said

The players' CHEO visit may still be in the planning phase, but other events already have taken place.

Monday was the Christmas party for the Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation. Phillips and his wife Erin both serve on the board of directors for that charity.

"It went great, it was a great turn out. You bring families out, have some fun, play with toys and see Santa," said Phillips.

Phillips also took part in the Tremblant 24H trip on Sunday.

"We went up there and they raise a little over 2 million. We also have the snowsuit fund and radiothon.

"We are going on (with charity activities)."

One of the most difficult questions to answer this Christmas, said Phillips, would be if children ask why there is no hockey.

But Phillips still offered some suggestions.

"Show them a picture of Gary Bettman and ask if they have seen this guy," Phillips said with a chuckle.

"I think the easiest answer is to keep it simple for them. We are in the (same) boat as them. We are fans of the game and want to play and you can't explain a lockout and all that stuff, but if you let us go play, we'll play."

The other option, Phillips said, is to ask Santa to bring back hockey.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.12.2012

646247 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators' Daniel Alfredsson ain't sweet on tweets

By Don Brennan ,Ottawa Sun

Nothing personal, folks, but Daniel Alfredsson is not about to get a Twitter account

Well, okay, maybe it is a little bit personal. Or a little too personal for the captain's liking.

"I wouldn't be the guy that updates it all the time," the 40-year-old Senators winger said when asked why he doesn't join the growing legion of his union

brothers who utilize the "online social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages" across the Twitter-sphere in 140 characters or less.

"I would write two tweets a year."

Senators on Twitter include Marc Methot, Zack Smith, Guillaume Latendresse, Kyle Turris, Ben Bishop and Craig Anderson. Most of the Binghamton Senators also have accounts.

If he joined, Alfredsson would almost instantly have thousands of followers.

"I don't need that," he said.

You don't see any benefits?

"None," he said.

But Twitter brings fans closer to players, it was pointed out.

"Yeah," said Alfredsson, "that's another reason I don't want it."

You don't want fans to know you better?

"No," he said laughing.

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Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.12.2012

646248 Ottawa Senators

Don Brennan: All the Twits have taken over the NHL

By Don Brennan, Ottawa Sun

Further investigation shows us a total of 13 tilts are slated for three Mondays from now, including a Senators visit to Buffalo. At least it's a 5 p.m. start, which means that by the time we ring in 2013 we'll have had a couple of hours to transcribe another Ryan Miller tantrum.

I was alerted to the scoop by a link on the Twitter account of Montreal Gazette writer @dave_stubbs, who noted that the NHL.com website "looks more bizarre by the day." He could have added that with each passing hour Bettman, Don Fehr, the owners and all the players in this lockout are coming across as Hall of Fame Twits, but he only had 140 characters.

Twitter has brought followers to the scrums around Bettman and Fehr without them having to camp out on the streets all day waiting for those two clowns to say nothing, or put a foot in their mouth. It also gives the underappreciated media something to do while precious moments of their lives tick away.

My favourite tweeter of the lockout has been not a person but a thing: @nhlpodium, which, of course, was created by one of the bored media campers who decided to speak on behalf of the stand holding the microphone into which Twits moan about not getting their way. All the hockey insiders doing their best to provide updates have been rendered useless by the Twits, who seemingly haven't moved negotiations much further along than they were Sept. 15. At least @nhlpodium has made us laugh when we have otherwise felt like crying.

However, I'm now concerned @nhlpodium is getting out of the business, as its profile states that "I used to be something people found relevant and entertaining, but then I decided not to be that anymore. Just like the NHL!"

Its last tweet was downright depressing: (None of you will ever see me again).

Say it ain't so, Po!

In just one week, @nhlpodium's following grew to 15,000 thanks to some humorous tweets like:

n I've clearly been located way too far to the southwest, but Bettman refuses to let them move me.

n Oh god that annoying little man is going to come out and stand behind me again, isn't he?

n What's the difference between me, and a promise to Glendale city council? NHL officials actually intend to stand behind me.

n Just sitting here on a stage by myself like an idiot while everyone stares at me. Not sure how to handle this. Phil Kessel, call me.

n Uh oh, it must be Bettman coming out, they just hid a stool behind me.

I also follow a number of players on Twitter, some of whom have looked as ridiculous with their thoughts as Ron Hainsey, Manny Maholtra, Chris Campoli and, yes, even Sidney Crosby have looked standing like dazed sheep behind Fehr.

The worst was Scottie Upshall, who on Dec. 6 tweeted: "There's no pressure yet on the owners to lose this year, that's why they still treat us like Cattle. They'll need a partner come January."

NHL players stay in North America's nicest hotels and are provided worldclass care by their employers. I am convinced "cattle" is the new word kids are using for "royalty."

Upshall, who is paid a \$3.5- million salary by the Panthers, has never had more than 18 goals or 32 points in his 10 NHL seasons. He must bring something to the table, as five teams have hired him. Or does that mean four teams have happily let him walk?

Anyway, on Dec. 7 Upshall appeared to be in a better mood with a "Good Mornin everyone!" tweet from a beautiful spot that might well have been situated on the French Riviera.

Do cattle like to graze near water?

If it appears I'm with the owners in this lockout, I'm not. Nor do I side with the players. For letting this thing go on, both parties are full of Twits.

Don't go, Po. You're all that still makes sense.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.12.2012 646249 Philadelphia Flyers

Inside the NHL: League, union still can salvage season

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

Face it. Most of us only do things when faced with a deadline.

For the NHL and the players union - which will resume talks, with federal mediators by their sides, on Wednesday - that deadline is almost upon them.

From here, the sides have just two weeks, maximum, to get a deal done.

Why two weeks?

Gary Bettman, the NHL commissioner, says teams need to play at least a 48-game season to protect the game's supposed integrity. (The game's integrity has disappeared because of the third work stoppage under Bettman, but that's another story.)

In order to play 48 games, the season would have to start by Jan. 5. That would give teams a 14-week schedule, with the regular season ending on April 13, the original date of season finales. That way, the playoff schedule would not be altered.

In a 14-week season, teams would alternate three- and four-game weeks. (Trying to compress more games into that limited space would be ludicrous and would compromise the game's supposed integrity.)

In order for that to happen, a deal would have to be completed by Christmas. That would give teams 11 days before the season started. That time would be needed for players to return from Europe and to have a short training camp.

The clock is ticking, and it says here a deal will get done within two weeks. The sides are close on most issues - teams' salary-cap maximums and amnesty buyouts will be battles - and the approaching deadline will increase everyone's urgency.

If a deal was done sooner and the season started Dec. 31, more than 48 games could be played. For that to happen, a collective bargaining agreement would have to be in place by Dec. 20.

More games mean more money. That's something both sides won't argue about. And, so, yes, there is suddenly extra incentive at the bargaining table

When the labor dispute ends, will the fans come flocking back?

Flyers fans have shown remarkable loyalty during the lockout. Shawn Tilger, the team's senior vice president of business operations, said Tuesday that "less than 1 percent" of the team's 18,280 season-ticket holders have canceled their tickets during the work stoppage. That means fewer than 182 fans have been angry enough to fight through the red tape to get their money back.

That said, based on the hundreds of e-mails and tweets I have received, fans will be slower to return than in the past.

One fan, trying to send a message to the league and players, has asked people to boycott the openers.

P.J. Boyle, a former South Jersey resident who is now retired in Florida, said he has "lived all over the country," but that "one constant for me" has been rooting for the Flyers and watching every game on his NHL TV package. Not anymore. He feels fans have been taken for granted, and he sent an e-mail asking for Ed Snider's address because he wanted to mail a package to the Flyers' founder.

"I'd like to send him all my accumulated Flyers memorabilia from the previous 45 years of active fandom," he wrote, listing many items, including a John LeClair jersey and bobblehead, a toy Zamboni in Flyers colors, and a scrapbook with newspaper clippings from the 35-game unbeaten streak in 1979-80.

"I'm thinking Mr. Snider might need this stuff more than I do at this point," Boyle added. "Perhaps he could have a garage sale to help his financial situation. But more than that, perhaps he would receive a message about the damage being done to his franchise and his league by the idiocy now in progress."

The idiocy is close to ending. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646250 Philadelphia Flyers

Honor for Ed Snider

COMCAST SPECTACOR chairman Ed Snider will be recognized by the Philadelphia Sports Writers Association with a special award named in his honor at its dinner on Jan. 28 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel on Route 70 in Cherry Hill.

The founder of the Flyers will receive the Ed Snider Lifetime Distinguished Humanitarian award for his many years of benefiting charitable organizations and agencies in the Philadelphia area. It will continue to bear his name.

Tickets are \$95 and available online at www.PSWA.org or by check payable to PSWA c/o Robbie Kenney, Ticket Chairman, 110 Harrogate Drive, Lumberton, N.J. 08048. Fans can also friend PSWA on Facebook.

Doors open at 5, with dinner starting at 6:30.

- Mike Kern

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646251 Philadelphia Flyers

End in sight for NHL labor fight

Rich Hofmann, Daily News Sports Columnist

ENTER THE mediators - or, rather re-enter. And maybe this is where the NHL and its union make the deal. Maybe, after the progress of last week was buried in angry rhetoric, this is what the two sides now need: a fig leaf to hide behind as they take the last tentative steps toward an agreement.

Somewhere, Gary Bettman and Donald Fehr are plotting the endgame. They have to be. Unless the owners are hellbent on total victory or Fehr has some kind of messianic view of this transaction, the compromise is there to be made. Unless they are crazy, the season will not be canceled. Repeat: will not.

It has been thought for weeks now that they needed some kind of a deadline, or some kind of new pressure point (like union decertification), to provide the final impetus. But last week, when Bettman concocted the scheme that had players and owners negotiating face-to-face, without their leaders, and when the owners sweetened the league's offer with an extra \$89 million and other concessions, it clearly moved the sides closer than they have been.

It might be that they still need a deadline. It is possible that the bargaining relationship between the players and the owners remains so immature, and the concessions being sought by the owners remain so large, that nothing short of imminent annihilation will bring closure.

But, maybe not.

Maybe, the fig leaf.

Talks are set to resume Wednesday; undisclosed city, no media, all good. Mediation could be the proper mechanism now if both sides are ready. The owners moved with their most recent proposal. No one talks much about the union's counterproposal - it was buried beneath the acrimony - but the suspicion is that it likely contained some things the owners like.

When personalities become an issue - and it is a fair guess at this point, given the progress that was made when Bettman and Fehr were out of the room - mediation can help. It is probably fair to say that Fehr has been moving the goalposts, stalling for time, waiting for the best deal - and, well, if the union is ready, a mediator can work to root those goalposts so that, if the owners need to talk another step, they can be more confident that Fehr will not back out at the last minute.

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Put it this way: If the owners still feel they cannot pin down the union after this, then they do need to set a deadline for canceling the season. If this mediation does not work, that is all they have left.

There was a chance, back when, that the opening of the regular season would have provided that deadline - because there really is so much more money involved for the NHL and so many more good things going on in their business than the last time the two sides fought. Of course, that would have required a significant moderation in the owners' demands. And while there was some moderation, the union did not see enough. It is not hard to see their side of that argument. Fehr did not sign on to surrender.

There has been no meaningful deadline since then. The owners tried to introduce one when they canceled the Winter Classic, but it did not work. The owners have tried a lot of things but they believe Fehr has remained a moving target.

Why? Because the union is in the position, based upon the reality of power, where it is going to have to give back a lot of cash in this negotiation. Everybody acknowledges that much. It is a league of haves and have-nots, and the have-nots need help, and the NHL has the power to demand that the union provide the help by rolling back the salary cap, just as the NFL and NBA did. That's just the way it is.

This needs to be repeated: There is no right side in this dispute and there is no wrong side. It is a business negotiation, period. Both sides are using their power to get as much of the money as they can. The owners are not evil for seeking to roll back salaries, just as the players were not evil when salaries were skyrocketing under previous deals, or for trying to hang on to everything they can in this deal.

For the sake of the fans - and given the lost season the league endured in 2004-05 - you would like to think that the relationship might have matured by now. But here we are. You can fixate on the messy road they have traveled, but it is better to focus on the here and now - undisclosed location, media blackout, mediators in place. It is starting to feel like time.

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646252 Philadelphia Flyers

Mike Eruzione hoping to score cash

TOM MAHON, Daily News Staff Writer mahont@phillynews.com

YOU DON'T have to believe in miracles to own the jersey Mike Eruzione wore - and the stick he used - in the U.S.'s 4-3 win over the Soviet Union at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, N.Y.

The items will, according to SportsCollectorsDaily.com, be auctioned at Heritage Auction's Winter Platinum Night in Manhattan in February.

The U.S. captain used the stick to score the game-winner in the medalround game that has become known as the "Miracle on Ice."

According to the website, the white No. 21 jersey is estimated to be worth \$1 million. The stick's estimated value is \$100,000.

The 58-year-old Eruzione, now a motivational speaker, is also auctioning the blue jersey he wore in the gold-medal game against Finland. That's estimated at \$200,000.

No word on why he's auctioning the items.

Rad pads

When the NFL owners meet in Dallas on Wednesday, they are expected to address an issue they've already voted on: Requiring all players to wear thigh and knee pads next season.

Representatives from Nike and Under Armour will be present to show off the new pads, which are expected to look as good as they feel.

"For some players, they need to pass the mirror test," Ray Anderson, the NFL's executive vice president of football operations, told Fox Sports. "They like to look good, look sleek. They want to move unencumbered. It was important for us to address the performance and the aesthetics of the new pads."

Wonder what Chuck Bednarik thinks about the "aesthetics" of knee pads?

According to Fox Sports, a 2010 survey showed that only 30 percent of players wear the pads, with linebackers, wide receivers, defensive linemen and d-backs the least likely to do so.

"For over a year we have been getting input, including from players, on what the padding will be like," Anderson said. "But starting in 2013, thigh and knee pads will be required, like they were before 1994."

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646253 Philadelphia Flyers

Why NHL deadline is only 2 weeks away

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

Face it. Most of us only do things when we are faced with a deadline.

For the NHL and the NHL Players' Association _ which will resume talks Wednesday in New York City _ that deadline is almost upon us.

From here, the sides have just two weeks to get a deal done.

Why two weeks?

Gary Bettman, the NHL commissioner, says teams need to play at least a 48-game season to protect the game's, um, integrity. (From here, the game's integrity has disappeared because of the third work stoppage under Bettman, but that's another story.)

In order to play 48 games, the season would have to start by Jan. 5. That would give teams a 14-week schedule, with the regular season ending on April 13, the original date of finales. That way, the playoff schedule would not be altered.

In a 14-week season, teams would play three games one week, followed by four games the next week. (Trying to compress more games into that limited space would be ludicrous and would compromise the game's, um, integrity.)

In order for that to happen, a deal would have to be completed by Christmas. That would give teams 11 days before the season started. The 11 days are needed for players to return from Europe and for teams to have a short training camp.

The clock is ticking, and it says here a deal will get done within the next two weeks. The sides are close on most issues, and the approaching deadline will increase everyone's urgency level.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Book signings. Hall of Famer Bernie Parent and Jakki Clarke, daughter of Flyers great Bobby Clarke, will have joint book signings Dec. 19 at the Barnes & Noble on 1805 Walnut in Rittenhose Square. The signing will be held between 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Parent, who led the Flyers to a pair of Stanley Cups in the 1970s, will be signing his autobiography, "Unmasked: Bernie Parent and the Broad Street Bullies." Clarke wrote "Flyers Lives: Philadelphia Hockey Greats Share Their Personal Stories." Ed Snider wrote the foreward.

Follow Sam Carchidi on Twitter @BroadStBull.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.12.2012

646254 Philadelphia Flyers

Hartnell takes issue with Hamrlik's lockout comments

Scott Hartnell didn't pull his punches Tuesday morning with regards to Washington Caps defenseman Roman Hamrlik.

Speaking on The Team 1200 in Ottawa, the Flyers' forward said he wonders if Capitals teammates will back Hamrlik up this season.

Recall Hamrlik, who is 38, ripped the NHLPA and executive director Donald Fehr in a Czech interview last month.

Some interpreted Hamrlik's remarks as a sign union membership was getting antsy with the lockout and Fehr's tactics.

"I can't wait to see what his teammates do when guys go after him," Hartnell said on Tuesday. "To sell the PA under the bus and to stick up for a guy like that is going to be hard. I think [Troy] Brouwer said it best in his comments."

Hamrlik said he and Brouwer have cleared the air.

In November, Hamrlik said, "I am disgusted. We have to push Fehr to the wall to get the deal. Time is against us. We lost 1/4 season, it is \$425 million. Who will give it back to us? Mr. Fehr?

"There should be voting between players. Four questions -- yes or no -- then count it. If half of players say let's play, then they should sign a new CBA. If there is no season he should leave and we will find someone new. Time is our enemy."

He later added, "If someone thinks I'm selfish, I may be, but it's selfish to play hockey. Like everybody else, I want to win the Cup with the Capitals, or at least have a chance."

Brouwer, also a Capital, reacted angrily after Hamrlik's comments.

"For me, I think those guys are selling us out, being selfish like that and making those comments ..." Brouwer told the Washington Post. "Me being on their team, how am I going to trust them as a teammate from now on?

"Because you know they're not going to support players in the big scheme of things when you go and you play on the team with them; it's going to be tough to want to back those guys from now on."

Hamrlik later apologized for how his comments were interpreted and said he supports the union.

"It's not about what I said or he said or they said," Hamrlik told CSNWashington this week. "It's all about making a solution quickly and hopefully bring a good solution to the table and start playing. "Everybody wants to play. Maybe I said it at the wrong time because it's a crucial time right now, but I said what I had to say."

Hartnell is the Flyers' representative on the CBA negotiating committee. He has not been at any of the CBA meetings, of late, because he is working out with other NHL players in Phoenix and organizing various charity events and fundraisers to aid victims of Hurricane Sandy.

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Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.12.2012

646255 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL, union to resume talks Wednesday

panaccio_byline_new.png

Collective bargaining talks will resume Wednesday but not in New York City, according to Deputy NHL Commissioner Bill Daly.

Daly told CSNPhilly.com this morning that his preference was to conduct the talks at a secret location, but that he needed the NHLPA to agree to such

"Different circumstances. Different stage of negotiations," Daly told the Bergen Record.

TSN's Aaron Ward reported this next round of talks will include a mediator. The union had requested such last week and the league rejected that offer.

There will not be interviews with the media, according to the union, which is standard practice when mediators are involved.

Talks broke down last Thursday night.

The lockout is in its 87th day.

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Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.12.2012

646256 Philadelphia Flyers

Lockout impacting more than just players, owners

Hockey fans, we are getting dangerously close to the breaking point for a lost season.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said last week that he can't envision a season shorter than 48 games. That was how long the 1995 lockout-shortened season lasted. With Monday's announcement that all NHL games have been canceled through Dec. 30 (see story), the league has now lost 526 games, which accounts for nearly 43 percent of the regular season.

I'm sure both sides have valid arguments, but sometimes I wonder if they realize the damage they are inflicting on their most diehard fans. The owners and the players are losing millions of dollars every day, but think about the tremendous angst they are causing for thousands and thousands of people who rely on hockey for employment.

Get Bettman and union chief Donald Fehr out of the negotiating room. It seems like the most productive negotiating sessions occur when a small group of players and owners meet face to face.

I have a hard time understanding why so many days go by between meetings. According to Forbes Magazine, 13 of the 30 NHL teams lost money last season. However, the average NHL team is worth \$282 million, which is 18 percent more than a year ago. Forbes reports the Flyers are worth \$336 million, eighth-highest in the NHL, but a far cry from the Toronto Maple Leafs, who are the first NHL club to top \$1 billion in valuation.

NHL revenues continue to rise and the players are fully aware of it. The 2011-12 league revenues were up nine percent to \$3.4 billion. If the two sides don't find common ground soon, who knows how much damage this lockout mess will cause.

Time is running out, and eventually the money will dry out, too.

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Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.12.2012

646257 Pittsburgh Penguins

Why coaches rarely admit error

By Dejan Kovacevic

Mike Tomlin has suffered far lousier losses than the one Sunday to the Chargers, but never has the man made more of a fool of himself than in the 48 hours that followed.

Not in scope.

Not in sensibilities.

The issue, as anyone within earshot of talk radio or within bloodshot eyes of Twitter can attest, is why the Steelers didn't go for a two-point conversion when down, 34-16, with only six minutes left. Conventional wisdom — common sense, really — dictates going for two because the team then needs only two touchdowns and two more conversions to tie. It's the only plausible path to a comeback.

The Steelers, as you know, kicked the extra point and were left needing three scores.

Huge mistake.

But one that might have been dismissed or at least downplayed with a sprinkle of candor.

You know ...

"I blew it."

"Head coach's responsibility."

"We all had a bad game, myself included."

Instead, Tomlin tried this after the game: "Until we stopped them, it was going to be insignificant. I was holding the two-point plays for that reason only. Now, we still have them in our hip pocket. Those specialty plays, we didn't want to put on tape unless we had an opportunity to close the gap."

The Steelers wanted to preserve the playbook?

Staggering, huh?

But wait. Tomlin brought out the shovel at his Tuesday press conference and kept on digging.

"I thought we had a better chance to sneak back into the game," he said of not going for two. "If they went into a chew-the-clock mentality in terms of running the ball, I thought we could get the quick stops necessary to get back in the game. I thought if we started going for two, and particularly getting them, that they would leave their playbook open. And obviously with the way they started the second half converting five or six third downs, I didn't like our chances."

Um, "sneak back?"

So the decision was founded on San Diego coach Norv Turner basically forgetting the score?

Tomlin was asked to clarify if, at that time, he didn't think it was viable for the Steelers to get two more touchdowns and two-point conversions.

"It was bleak at that point, yes."

But if it was so bleak, why were Ben Roethlisberger and Troy Polamalu still playing?

Was Turner supposed to sleep through that, too?

Look, Tomlin's job is tough, especially now. He's dealing with injuries, inconsistencies and now idiot running backs not showing up for games. I think we all can respect that.

Thus, if I had to guess, Tomlin and staff just flat-out failed to process the score and its implications. Some coaches still carry the Dick Vermeil cheat sheet, a mathematical if-then listing of when to go for two compiled by the former NFL coach. Others just wing it. This was a mistake. It happens.

So why not own up to it?

The simple answer is that head coaches and managers in professional sports seldom do. It's just not the culture.

Oh, they're big on sweeping statements such as "We were outplayed and outcoached," but I'll bet you can't count on one hand the number of times you've heard or read of a coach or manager take the fall for a specific failure within a game situation in this calendar year.

Flash back to Sept. 10, to the Pirates' crushing 4-3 loss to the Reds. That was the night Clint Hurdle stunningly yanked Wandy Rodriguez in the seventh inning even though Rodriguez had been dominant to that point with a pitch count of just 89. Enter Jared Hughes, and Cincinnati began teeing off

Hurdle, like Tomlin, has taken broad ownership of losses, but he stumbled to explain his role in facilitating this one: "Wandy was probably only going to get one more hitter, anyway, so I decided to make the move now."

That made no more sense than any of what Tomlin's been selling this week

The Penguins' Dan Bylsma was no different when asked to address his penalty-killers' epic woes — with no visible strategic adjustment — against the Flyers in the last Stanley Cup playoffs.

"Our penalty-killing is just going to have to win us a game," was all Bylsma said then.

Coaches hate fessing up to specifics. That's partly out of ego, partly because it can be all that people remember, but mostly because they fear it makes them look weak in front of the players. They don't see the benefit in that.

Sorry, but I do. At least once in a while.

The Pirates' players grumbled about that Rodriguez hook for weeks, and I can't imagine the Steelers' Antonio Brown will be tickled to hear that Tomlin called him out for repeated mental lapses in the same press conference where the head coach clumsily denied one of his own.

We're all human. Man up and move on.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.12.2012

646258 Pittsburgh Penguins

Mediators — not Crosby — to attend NHL labor meeting

By Josh Yohe and Rob Rossi

Federal mediators will be present when NHL labor negotiations resume Wednesday.

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby won't be.

Crosby confirmed he won't attend the talks one week after playing a key role in days of negotiations in New York.

"I don't plan on being there," he said. "It's good that they're talking. Hopefully, something good happens."

Federal mediators will preside over these talks for the first time since Nov. 29, when two days of sessions with mediators broke down. Those bargaining sessions were in Woodbridge, though neither the NHL nor NHLPA would disclose the site for Wednesday's sessions.

The NHL and NHLPA last negotiated Dec. 5 in New York. A day later, talks broke down after a group of owners new to the discussions, including the Penguins' Ron Burkle, became frustrated by a slow union response. Spirited news conferences by NHLPA executive director Don Fehr and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman followed.

Neither Fehr nor Bettman were involved in owners/players meetings last week that Crosby said were "very productive" before the Thursday breakdown. Owners won't attend the mediated session Wednesday.

An unusually large number of Penguins took part in a workout Tuesday at Southpointe. Players such as James Neal, Brooks Orpik and Deryk Engelland arrived last week in Pittsburgh, perhaps a sign that players believe a deal is imminent.

"That would be nice," Engelland said. "I think we are to the point where, if this thing is going to get settled, it's probably going to be in the next week or two. We know that, and we want to be ready."

Crosby reiterated he will consider playing in Europe if there is no agreement this season. He will, however, be patient in the next round of negotiations, hoping it will be the last one.

"No one's mindset is any different," Crosby said. "Hopefully, this is a good thing. Hopefully, we figure something out."

Josh Yohe and Rob Rossi are staff writers for Trib Total Media. Yohe can be reached at jyohe@tribweb.com, and Rossi can be reached at rrossi@tribweb.com.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.12.2012

646259 Pittsburgh Penguins

NHL lockout: Restart of talks generates little optimism

By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There's no question James Neal of the Penguins wishes the NHL lockout was over.

And maybe, just maybe, he suspects there's a decent chance that it will end soon.

But, even if all that is true, Neal insists it had nothing to do with his decision to return to this area and resume working out with some of his teammates at Southpointe Tuesday.

"It doesn't indicate anything," said Neal, who had been training near Toronto. "I just came back to check up on things and skate with the guys. It means nothing."

Neal, who had practiced at Southpointe earlier in the lockout, showed up one day after defenseman Brooks Orpik said he had come back because he wanted to get out of Boston, where he lives during the offseason, to avoid having winter weather complicate travel plans.

Orpik, like Neal, was adamant that optimism about any potential settlement in the NHL's labor dispute was not a factor in his decision.

Negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement, which broke off rather abruptly and harshly Thursday, will start again today at an undisclosed location -- NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly would say only that it won't happen in New York -- and with federal mediators rejoining the talks

Although a previous attempt at mediation produced no meaningful progress, the NHL Players' Association asked to try it again and the league, which had balked at the idea last week, agreed.

The NHL, players and mediators will have no shortage of topics to discuss.

In addition to high-profile matters such as rules governing contract length and structure and guidelines covering the transition to a new CBA, there are numerous other issues that have yet to be talked about, let alone resolved.

"The fact we haven't really even covered everything is kind of the scary part," Penguins center Sidney Crosby said. "There are some main issues that everyone knows, obvious issues.

"That being said, there are a lot of details, a lot of things that go into a CBA, and those haven't even really been started to be talked about, so they definitely have some work to do there."

Crosby was heavily involved in the talks last week, but said he does not plan to be today.

Nonetheless, he seemed pleased to learn that negotiations are resuming.

"The fact they're talking is good," he said. "We've all said that throughout this process. It's better than sitting around and not knowing what everyone is thinking. It's better to talk."

Craig Adams, the Penguins' player representative, said Tuesday he had not decided whether to attend the session today and echoed Crosby's point about how much remains to be done before a CBA can come together.

"There are lots of important things still to be agreed upon," Adams said.

He declined to specify one or two that could be particularly difficult to work out, but noted that the transition to the next CBA is multi-faceted and "very, very important to us."

Elements of that range from whether teams should be allowed to buy out contracts without having that money count against their salary-cap ceiling to the best way to deal with the inevitable drop in the ceiling if the players' share of hockey-related revenues goes from 57 percent to 50, as seems certain.

"From our point of view, if the [ceiling] decreases too quickly, by too much, there's going to be no room in the system for players to sign new contracts," Adams said. "You're going to end up with the free agents next summer, nearly every team will be right up against [the ceiling] and how are you going to get 23 or 24 guys [signed] under that? That's big for us."

Perhaps because they are genuinely concerned about the number and magnitude of issues still to be worked out -- or perhaps because NHLPA officials have urged them to be as noncommittal as possible when speaking publicly -- Penguins players have been decidedly reserved while talking about when they think the league will be back in business.

Or even whether they are confident that it will happen in time to save part of the 2012-13 season.

"We'll see," Crosby said. "I'm not making any predictions. I've always heard [NHLPA executive director Don Fehr] say he's done making predictions. I never could understand why. I figured a guy with this much experience would be able to make some type of prediction, but I can see why now."

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.12.2012

646260 St Louis Blues

Quick Hits: Gordo on the NHL dispute

17 hours ago • BY JEFF GORDON

Some pointed observations about the NHL lockout:

- The NHL and NHLPA will take another stab at salvaging the season this week. If the league starts treating the players like business partners in these last-ditch negotiations, we'll see a settlement and a 48- or 52-game mini-season. If the league maintains its strident take-it-or-leave-it negotiating tone until the bitter end, we won't see hockey until next fall at the earliest.
- Some owners are more concerned about dooming NHLPA czar Donald Fehr than getting an agreement. They forget this: The players hired the hard-line Fehr for a reason. They saw the war coming. They armed themselves for a long, hard battle. They figured the owners were ready to dump a whole season and they vowed not to capitulate.
- Sports commissioners don't need to earn the undying love of their athletes. As the long arm of the law, they tend to be unpopular. But the sports industry does not exist without the talent. Commissioners who earn universal scorn and ridicule from those performers are a liability.

And we're talking about you, Gary Bettman.

• The latest Bettman temper tantrum should galvanize the NHLPA's resolve and keep the players united. If they can remain firm as the days and weeks pass, they can permanently alter their relationship with the owners.

Once baseball owners finally realized it couldn't break the Fehr-led MLB Players Association, that industry embarked on a long stretch of labor peace. The same could happen in hockey.

• But the players cannot allow their loathing of Bettman to make them irrational. The decertification route is extreme. While it may feel emotionally satisfying to tell Bettman to take his league and shove it, killing the whole season would cost these guys a lot of money. The players would go back to drinking house wine and eating strip steaks instead of filets. That is a big price for a professional athlete to pay.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.12.2012

646261 St Louis Blues

Chesterfield man charged with assault during recreational hockey game

13 hours ago • By JOEL CURRIER jcurrier@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8256

BRENTWOOD • A Chesterfield man is accused of striking another man with a hockey stick during a no-checking recreational hockey game in Brentwood.

Police say Kevin Stephens, 27, of the 15600 block of Parasol Drive, struck Philip Heller, 29, in the face with the blade of his hockey stick during a game Oct. 14 at the Brentwood Recreation Complex.

The blow broke Heller's jaw in several places and required 17 screws to repair the bones, police said.

Stephens was charged with second-degree felony assault and jailed Thursday. He was released Friday after he posted a \$50,000 cash bail.

Neither Stephens nor Heller could be reached for comment Tuesday.

Detective Sgt. Jim McIntyre of the Brentwood Police Department said Stephens swung his hockey stick at Heller's face during an evening men's game about 9 p.m. at the Brentwood hockey rink.

"It's my understanding that there was some chippiness" on the ice, McIntyre said. Shortly after a faceoff and while the puck was in a different part of the ice, Stephens struck Heller in the face. "Everything that we have speaks to what would be outside the realm of acceptable" in a hockey game.

Heller was taken to a hospital and later had surgery to fix his jaw, McIntyre said. He said there was no evidence the players knew each other or had an ongoing feud.

Brad Barbeau, hockey supervisor in the Brentwood parks and recreation department, said Stephens was immediately ejected from the game and banned permanently from the league. Barbeau said referees routinely call penalties and players sometimes get in fights — but nothing near as serious as Stephens' alleged attack.

Barbeau said he saw a video of the incident and said Stephens' actions "just crossed every line I've ever seen in sports."

The 18-and-up Sunday night intermediate league has nine teams. Stephens played for the Warhawks; Heller was member of the Wolves. Barbeau said players wear helmets and pads but are not required to wear face cages or shields.

After Heller was taken to a hospital, the Wolves and Warhawks resumed the game and tied 4-4, Barbeau said.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.12.2012

646262 Tampa Bay Lightning

Bolts' Thompson fits with hometown team

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune

Nate Thompson finished up lunch following his game-day skate Monday afternoon, hopped in his car and drove home through a winter wonderland.

Navigating the snow covered roads of Anchorage, Alaska, Thompson soaked in the atmosphere as he enjoyed the rare opportunity to play in the

same rink he used to frequent in his youth dreaming of the day he might be able to lace them up in the same arena.

Because of the now nearly three-month lockout that has shut down the National Hockey League, Thompson has returned to his hometown to play for the Alaska Aces in the East Coast Hockey League – the same team he used to watch while growing up.

"It's been great," Thompson said. "It's been a pretty good fit for me being home having my mom and dad and my friends and to be able to just jump in their cars and drive down to see me play rather than flying 4,000 miles. Then having buddies and friends that I grew up with from Alaska, now getting the opportunity to play with them, it's been pretty fun."

Thompson has been joined on the Aces roster by other Alaskan-born NHL players Scott Gomez (Montreal), Joey Crabb (Toronto) and Brandon Dubinsky (Columbus). The quartet has helped to make Alaska into one of the top teams in the league, leading the Western Conference with an 18-7 record heading into Wednesday's game at second-place Idaho.

And heading into opposing ECHL rinks, littered with a roster of NHL players, has created somewhat of a stir in certain locations.

"I think in certain places that we played they've had pretty good crowd and it's been pretty hostile," Thompson said. "We've heard some choice words coming from the fans but other than that I think it's been good."

During the lockout, Thompson has stayed involved in what is taking place on the labor front, taking part in the conference calls held by the NHL Player's Association. Like many, he was frustrated by the theatrics last week when talks broke off with the union saying a deal was close and the league stating the opposite.

But Thompson holds optimism that the conclusion to the lockout is on the near horizon.

"I have a good feeling after January 1 (the NHL will be playing) but that's all I can say," Thompson said.

In the meantime, playing in the ECHL – equivalent to Double-A baseball – is certainly a drop from what Thompson has played in his professional career, but the league has improved from the days when Thompson used to sit in the stands of 6,000 seat Sullivan Sports Arena in Alaska's biggest city.

"The league has changed over the course of the past five or so years it's definitely a lot more of a development league," Thompson said "There are definitely some skilled guys down here. I think there are some good players in this league and some good skilled guys which kind of surprised me. It had a history of being a goon league with just some skill players out there but it's been the opposite."

With the reduced rosters – only 10 forwards dress each game – Thompson has been getting plenty of ice time and playing in all situations – penalty kill, five-on-five as well as the power play. With seven goals and 21 points in 23 games, Thompson is among the team's top scorers.

"It's been fun and I think the best thing is to get to play in every opportunity," he said. "And being on the power play is always fun to play on so it's been good to kind of be called the Marty St. Louis in the Steven Stamkos."

With all of the hockey Thompson has been playing – the Aces play up to four games week – he said he'll be ready to jump right into the fray when the NHL does get back up and running.

"I've been skating a lot, we play a lot of games and practicing, getting a lot of ice time I feel good right now," Thompson said. "If the season is starting I think I feel pretty good."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.12.2012

646263 Toronto Maple Leafs

World juniors: Underage player Nathan MacKinnon benefits from roommate Nugent-Hopkins' wisdom

Kevin McGran

CALGARY—If Nathan MacKinnon needs to understand how difficult it will be for the projected No. 1 in the summer NHL draft to make Team Canada's world junior squad, all he has to do is ask his roommate.

MacKinnon, one of four 18-year-olds at Canada's selection camp, is rooming with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins.

Two years ago, Nugent-Hopkins was among the last players cut from the team that went to Buffalo. He, too, was projected as the No. 1 overall pick, chosen ultimately by Edmonton, and was runner-up for NHL rookie of the year last year.

"Right away, it's really disappointing and upsetting," Nugent-Hopkins said of being cut two years ago. "But I went home, I went back to Red Deer and talked to my coach, Jesse Wallin, and he really made me see things in a different perspective. That really helped.

"We played that night and I felt good that night and carried on from there. I felt like my season got better after that camp."

MORE:World juniors: Team Canada takes 36 to camp, only 23 go to Russia

Rielly happy as Maple Leafs say he can stay with Team Canada

Nugent-Hopkins has passed that wisdom on to MacKinnon.

"He's in the same position as I was two years ago," Nugent-Hopkins said of MacKinnon. "I definitely didn't have the best camp I could have. I was really nervous coming into camp and I let that get the best of me. I told (MacKinnon) to play his game and not worry about anything going on. Hopefully something I can say can help him out a little bit."

That they are roommates is not a coincidence, said Steve Spott, head coach of the national junior squad.

"Those are two young men who have unique experiences," said Spott. "If there's someone to lend advice to Nathan, then Ryan can be a good mentor to him."

Turns out the mentorship has started and MacKinnon has been taking notes.

"I'm thankful to have him as my roommate," MacKinnon said of Nugent-Hopkins. "He told me to play my game and keep it simple and hopefully things will work out."

MacKinnon is the most highly touted of four 18-year-olds (all forwards) in the Canadian camp trying out for a tournament meant for 19-year-olds.

The others are Hunter Shinkaruk of the Medicine Hat Tigers, Sean Monahan of the Ottawa 67's and Jonathan Drouin, MacKinnon's winger with the Halifax Mooseheads who is also tabbed as a projected top-five pick.

"We're friends," MacKinnon said of his relationship with Drouin. "We wish the best for each other. It's not a competitive relationship. We play together, we go to school together, we eat together. We pretty much do everything together. We're buddies. Hopefully we can both do good things."

The chances that even one of the 18-year-olds will make the team are remote, especially with 36 players in camp and a good number of them close to being NHL-ready. Many might be in the NHL if not for the lockout.

But Spott insists he's not looking at birth year when it comes to picking this team.

"I'm a believer it's going to be a position earned," said Spott. "This is a 19-year-old tournament. But the players we have that are draft-eligible deserve to be here and they're going to be evaluated like any 19-year-old player."

Spott started the camp with MacKinnon and Drouin on the same line, just as in Halifax. The top line looked to be Nugent-Hopkins between Jonathan Huberdeau and Mark Scheifele. The second line was Ryan Strome between Charles Hudon and Brett Ritchie.

Only time will tell if MacKinnon and the other younger players can earn a spot. But if they do, it will be in a support role, and not as the go-to top-line players.

"Every team you're going to, you're going to have to do different things," said MacKinnon. "Here, there's tons of great talent. And even guys that are playing 25 minutes a night are going to have to play third- and fourth-line roles. You're going to have to sacrifice a little.

'I'm comfortable playing anywhere. I'm going to make the most of any role, be it first-line centre, or fourth line. I'm not worried about it."

MacKinnon, who hails from Cole Harbour, N.S., is most often compared to his hometown hero, Sidney Crosby. Crosby twice made Team Canada's junior team as an underage player, so MacKinnon shakes off the comparison.

"Sid was going to make it regardless of whether he was 19 or 16 that year," said MacKinnon. "It wasn't his age, it was how good of a player he was. I'm not looking at age. I know the coaching staff isn't concerned about age.

"I'm going to try to play hard and hopefully make the team."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.12.2012

646264 Toronto Maple Leafs

Rielly happy as Maple Leafs say he can stay with Team Canada

Kevin McGran

CALGARY—If Morgan Rielly makes Team Canada's world junior team, the Maple Leafs have pledged to leave their top defensive prospect with the program through the tournament.

That comes as welcome news to Hockey Canada organizers, who worry that an end to the NHL lockout will see an exodus of players from their roster to NHL training camps. And it comes as a relief to Rielly.

"That's great," said Rielly when told the news. "At the moment, I'm just trying to make the team."

If the lockout ends, NHL teams will be allowed to bring two or three of their Canadian Hockey League players to camp. The Leafs told the CHL they'd put Rielly — the fifth pick from the summer — and David Broll of the Sault Ste, Marie Greyhounds — on their list earlier in the fall.

But the Leafs went further this week, telling Hockey Canada they could keep Rielly until the tournament finishes.

"It's a great development (tournament) for an elite player," Leafs GM Brian Burke said.

The Leafs have two prospects — forward Tyler Biggs and goalie Garrett Sparks — attending the American under-20 selection camp. Both will either stick with the U.S. team or return to their OHL team.

Team Canada has big plans for Rielly, a mobile defenceman teamed with Dougie Hamilton on the first day of camp on what could be the team's top defensive pairing.

"With Ryan Murray out, we need someone to fill those minutes and Morgan (Rielly) is going to get an opportunity to play with Dougie and hopefully he takes advantage of it," said coach Steve Spott. "He's such a smart player. When you look at the type of game he plays, he has the puck most of the time

"He's a player that for me has world class skill. Runs the power play. He's a puck possession type defenceman," said Spott. "We met with him, we told him to play to his strengths and not sit back. When he doesn't have the puck, show how great he is. We've won with him before. I trust him and I fully expect he'll play that way."

Rielly, meanwhile, is adjusting to life as a Leaf prospect, where he feels the presence — and pressure — from fans he hadn't before, starting with an overheated Twitter account.

"It blew up pretty good. Overnight I got 8,000 followers," said Rielly.

As for making Team Canada, he says he just has to play to his strengths in a camp filled with elite teenage hockey players.

"You have to play at the top of your game at all times," said Rielly.

"If you did make an error, they're probably going to make you pay. You have to always be on your game and always have to play smart."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.12.2012

646265 Toronto Maple Leafs

World juniors: Team Canada takes 36 to camp, only 23 go to Russia

Kevin McGran

CALGARY—As 36 of Canada's best teenaged hockey players gathered here on Monday, it became obvious the hardest part about this week's camp will be whittling their number down to 23.

"My job is to pick the 23 best," said Steve Spott, who'll coach Canada's entry at the world junior championship in Ufa, Russia, beginning Dec. 26 against Germany. "I want to be aggressive, I believe in puck possession. I believe in getting in hard, we don't sit back. We want to be a team that's going to play on its toes."

If anyone is benefitting from the NHL lockout, it's Canada's national junior team, which includes eight or 10 players who might normally be in the NHL, including six members of last year's bronze-medal team, coming to camp.

"Picking the depth, that's going to be the hardest part," said Spott. "You've got a couple of ways of looking at it: Do you want to take the 13 most-skilled guys up front? Or have the third and fourth lines to have a different element?

"Those are some of the decisions we have to make. They're not easy. People think when you pick teams like this it's easy. These are difficult decisions."

The players know it. The decision-making begins in earnest Tuesday when the players have their first practice, followed by a scrimmage in the evening.

"You're playing against high-end guys and trying to play your game," said Leaf prospect Morgan Rielly of the Moose Jaw Warriors. "And you're also trying to do what the coaches ask of you.

"It's just ... a pretty tough camp with some high-end guys. Gotta keep playing hard each and every shift."

The team got a huge boost when Ryan Nugent-Hopkins was declared fit to play and was released by the Edmonton Oilers' AHL farm team in Oklahoma City. Nugent-Hopkins was cut from Canada's world junior team two years ago, and didn't play last year because he'd made the NHL at 18.

"It's definitely exciting for me," said Nugent-Hopkins. "I got the chance at 17, but unfortunately I didn't make it. I'm really happy I have the opportunity to try again."

Nugent-Hopkins is already slotted in as the team's No. 1 centre.

"He wants to be treated lie everybody else," Spott said of Nugent-Hopkins. "Because of the fact he is a world-class player and some of the expectations that will come through media, I can tell you we will treat him like a regular 19-year-old and ultimately put him in situations where we need him to be great.

"He's looking forward to the challenge. He has an opportunity to win a gold medal I know he's excited about that."

The NHL cancelled games up until Dec. 30 — roughly the midway point of the junior tournament. But there are still no guarantees that NHL teams will leave their players with their junior programs if the lockout should end.

"I haven't really explored that yet," said Nugent Hopkins. "When that comes ... we'll cross that bridge. Right now, I'm just focused on camp and I'm just going to go from there."

There's a very real possibility that after Team Canada makes its cuts on Thursday, the roster will undergo an overhaul if the NHL lockout ends prior Christman

If the NHL heads back to work, then any of the players already drafted — especially the likes of Nugent-Hopkins, Rielly, Dougie Hamilton, Ryan Strome, Mark Scheifele, Jonathan Huberdeau, Griffin Reinhart and Matt Dumba — could be called into camp.

"That's going to be a big part of the exit process," Spott said of the what-if conversation he'll have with prospective cuts. "That could be a realistic opportunity for those boys, that although it may not have worked out well today, there could be an opportunity down the line (if the lockout ends). We hope it doesn't come to that. But it's a realistic possibility."

The tournament marks the first time in five years the event hasn't been staged in North America. Canada had home ice advantage in three of the last four tournaments.

Canada hasn't won gold since 2009 in Ottawa.

"We're aware that it's been a few years now since Canada brought home gold," said Rielly. "But we're also aware there are some pretty good teams out there.

"But as Team Canada, you always expect to win. And that's what Team Canada is going to try to do this year."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.12.2012

646266 Toronto Maple Leafs

Canada's world junior hopefuls face off in Red/White game

By Terry Koshan , Toronto Sun

Morgan Rielly will spend Christmas in Russia provided he makes the final roster of Canada's junior team.

Maple Leafs general manager Brian Burke told TSN on Tuesday that if the NHL lockout ends, Rielly will not be summoned to Toronto for what would be a short Leafs training camp.

All indications are that Rielly, the fifth pick overall by the Leafs in the NHL entry draft in June, will be an important part of Canada's blue line. The swift-skating defenceman has 28 points in 33 games for the Moose Jaw Warriors of the Western Hockey League.

He will be paired with Dougie Hamilton, a Boston Bruins first-round pick, for the Red/White game.

The lineup for the Red/White game on Tuesday night at the Markin MacPhail Centre:

TEAM RED

GOALTENDERS

Jordan Binnington

Laurent Brossoit

DEFENCE PAIRS

Morgan Rielly-Dougle Hamilton

Tyler Wotherspoon-Frank Corrado

Griffin Reinhart-Mathew Dumba

FORWARD LINES

Jonathan Huberdeau-Ryan Nugent-Hopkins-Mark Scheifele

Jonathan Drouin-Nathan MacKinnon-JC Lipon

Anthony Camara-Philip Danault-Tom Wilson

Extra: Francis Beauvillier

TEAM WHITE

GOALTENDERS

Jake Paterson

Malcolm Subban

DEFENCE PAIRS

Scott Harrington-Xavier Ouellet

Adam Pelech-Ryan Murphy

Derrick Pouliot-Ryan Sproul

FORWARD LINES

Charles Hudon-Ryan Strome-Brett Ritchie

Daniel Catenacci-Boone Jenner-Ty Rattie

Sean Monahan-Tyler Graovac-Mark McNeill

Extra: Hunter Shinkaruk

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.12.2012 646267 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout could also boost Canada's Spengler Cup hopes

THE CANADIAN PRESS/KEYSTONE/Peter Schneider

Canada could be sending quite an impressive team to the Spengler Cup.

With the NHL's announcement Monday that all games through Dec. 30 have been cancelled, the possibility of locked-out players wearing the Maple Leaf over the holidays in scenic Davos, Switzerland increased.

Tyler Seguin, Jason Spezza, Patrice Bergeron and John Tavares are among the Canadian players who have spent the lockout playing in the Swiss league and would be eligible to compete in the historic club team tournament. Hockey Canada has been in touch with all of them.

"These are top-end guys that would obviously put us in a good situation with our overall team makeup," said Brad Pascall, Hockey Canada's vice-president of national teams.

Brooks Laich and Michael Del Zotto could also be available along with Matt Duchene, who recently signed with Ambri-Piotta after spending a couple months in Sweden.

However, Pascall is facing the same dilemma as his colleagues who are currently assembling the country's world junior team. He needs to prepare for a Plan A and Plan B since it's possible the NHL lockout could end just before Canada faces Adler Mannheim on Dec. 26 in the tournament opener.

The final will be played Dec. 31.

"We're kind of going day by day," said Pascall.

The Canadian team isn't expected to name its roster until just before Christmas because of the uncertainty brought on by the NHL work stoppage.

Each year, the team is largely comprised of Canadian-born pros based in Switzerland along with a handful of guys from other European leagues and the American Hockey League. The tournament is considered the oldest in hockey—it dates back to 1923—and features the Canadian entry, host HC Davos (which could feature past Canadian Olympian Joe Thornton) and three other European club teams.

Canada last won the event 2007, when it had veteran Curtis Joseph in goal.

If the NHL lockout hasn't been solved by the end of the month, the pool of Canadian players would arguably be the best the country has ever sent. During the 2004-05 lockout, Hockey Canada elected not to include NHL players on the team.

Seguin has been among the best players in all of Europe this season with a league-leading 23 goals in 24 games for EHC Biel. Tavares (Bern), Bergeron (Lugano) and Spezza (Rapperswil-Jona) have each produced more than a point per game and boast extensive international experience.

The prospect of sending them all to the Spengler Cup is an enticing one for Hockey Canada.

"No matter what event it is we always try to put our best team together," said Pascall. "Our goal is to win these events."

The Canadian team will be coached by Doug Shedden, a native of Wallaceburg, Ont., who currently works for EV Zug in Switzerland.

National Post LOADED: 12.12.2012 646268 Vancouver Canucks Vancouver Canucks prospect Patrick McNally kicked off Harvard University team amid reported academic scandal

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun December 11, 2012

VANCOUVER — Patrick McNally, a defenceman who was a fourth-round draft pick of the Vancouver Canucks in 2010, has been removed from the Harvard University hockey team amid a reported academic scandal.

McNally is one of four Harvard players who has left the team and will not return this season, a university spokesman said Tuesday.

"I can confirm that they are no longer on the 2012-13 roster," Jeff Selesnick, assistant director of athletic communications, said in a telephone interview. "In terms of duration or nature of that absence, I really can't elaborate on that to any degree."

Selesnick said the four players would be eligible to return next year, but added: "I'm not sure what their intent is. I can't speak to their intent."

Harvard's student newspaper, The Crimson, reported some of the removals may be related to an academic scandal that rocked the university this past summer.

McNally and teammates Max Everson and Mark Luzar were all removed from the Harvard roster last week. Stephen Michalek left the program last month

"Some guys had to take a year absent," Harvard goalie Raphael Girard told The Crimson. "I won't say any names, but like any other team, we might have some problems with the academic scandal."

College Hockey News reported this week that the action could be related to an investigation Harvard launched in August into students who were enrolled in a government class were alleged to have plagiarized answers or inappropriately collaborated on the class's final take-home exam.

The Canucks offered only a brief comment on McNally.

"We can confirm that Patrick McNally is no longer on the 2012-13 Harvard men's hockey roster and is taking a leave of absence from the university," assistant general manager Laurence Gilman said Tuesday. "We cannot speculate on the duration of the absence and will not comment further on the nature of his leave at this time."

McNally, a 21-year-old, 6-2, 190-pound defenceman, had three points in seven games this season. He was named to the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference all-rookie squad after a 28-point campaign as a freshman last

Gilman said Dave Gagner, the Canucks' director of player development, has spoken with McNally.

"He's in somewhat regular contact with all our players and it's no different in Patrick's case," Gilman said. "We did know about Patrick's circumstances in advance of it becoming known to the public."

Gilman would not comment on McNally's plans. If he signed any kind of pro deal, McNally would lose his collegiate eligibility and would not be able to return to Harvard next year.

Michalek, one of the four players who has left the Harvard team, recently joined the Cedar Rapids Roughriders of the United States Hockey League, the top junior circuit south of the border. The USHL could be an option for McNally, a native of Glen Head, N.Y. who was drafted out of the Milton Academy in Massachusetts.

In his senior year at Milton, McNally had 22 goals and 51 points in 28 games.

Canucks general manager Mike Gillis spoke highly of McNally after selecting him 115th overall in the 2010 draft.

"He's going to go to Harvard and is a bright young guy and his father is an FBI agent," Gillis said at the time. "He's an offensive, skating defenceman and we think he's got a tremendous amount of potential."

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Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 12.12.2012

646269 Vancouver Canucks

Bieksa: 'There's a framework to get a deal done but we should be playing now'

Ben Kuzma

VANCOUVER — With a degree in finance, Kevin Bieksa can wrap his head around collective bargaining agreement issues as easily as he wraps up opposition forwards. The Vancouver Canucks defenceman can take the complicated and make the layman feel educated and entertained.

With the NHL and NHL Players' Association agreeing to renew talks Wednesday at an undisclosed location with federal mediation in an effort to end the lockout, there may be less venom spewed with other voices of reason in the room in a non-binding setting. More calm should be in order but three high hurdles still need to be cleared. Aside from agreeing on CBA and player contract lengths, the one that could trip up a deal is the year-to-year variance on contracts. Players want a 25 per cent difference on multi-year deals that are seven years or longer, meaning the lowest point of the salary scale must be a minimum 25 per cent of the highest point. It would include a provision with a salary cap hit placed on teams if the player doesn't meet the contract commitment. It would also allow those teams to sign franchise players long term and lower the cap hit to free up more money for other players.

However, the league argues that would still produce back-diving contracts and owners only want a five per cent variance. They basically want to close a loophole that opened in the expired CBA and allowed legal circumvention of the cap.

"The five per cent takes away a lot of skills of general managers and agents," argued Bieksa.

There's going to need to be creativity next season with the cap ceiling expected to be \$59.9 million US. Right now, the Canucks have 13 players signed at \$55.4 million for the 2013-14 season, but the hit can be lessened in a Roberto Luongo trade. Five other teams have even more money committed from 15 to 17 players to the challenge is widespread and significant.

As much as the league is seeking a 10-year CBA term with an opt out after eight and the players want eight years with an opt out after six, those gaps might be easier to bridge. But the five-year limit on contract length sought by the league — seven years if re-signing your own free agent — is opposed by the players proposing eight years. And the fact they've come down from 12 to 10 and now eight, a further compromise is going to be a tough sell to the union.

"There just seems to be certain things they (owners) won't come to us on," added Bieksa. "We've been making a lot of concessions, but we need a willing partner. It's going to be a long process and can you imagine being up every time there was a glimmer of hope? You'd be driving yourself crazy.

"Their offer is off the table, but there's no reason why we can't get back there. There's a framework to get a deal done."

When the league went from \$211 million to \$300 in its make-whole provision last week to protect most contracts already in place, it proved what most always believed. There's always room for movement. The league got off its tough original stance of two-year entry-level deals, eliminating arbitration and pushing service to 10 years for unrestricted free agency. All that bluster has subsided and entry level deals are back to three years, arbitration remains the same as does seven years of service to become a UFA. However, the league can always say that \$300 million will only be provided if term demands with CBA and contract length are met to satisfaction of the owners. And that's where there could be another stand off and a further erosion of trust.

"It's December, everybody wants to play now so it's not a good feeling," stressed Bieksa. "It would be nice to get something done before Christmas and give yourself a little bit of a training camp and start fresh in the new year. That would be ideal I think.

"But we should be playing hockey right now."

And the sooner the better. Bieksa even took to Twitter to add some levity to the long and bitter NHL lockout. When former teammate Willie Mitchell recently tweeted a picture from the wilds of snow-laden Minnesota with the

caption "feels like the holidays", Bieksa responded by posting a pool-side picture with palm trees in the background. The caption read "it does feeling like Christmas!".

"That was from the 2011 collection," chuckled Bieksa. "My plans are contingent on the season."

A resolution in the next week to 10 days could allow training camps to open as early as Boxing Day to have New Year's Eve as a showcase option. That would allow a 56-game season but a minimal 48-game slate could still be played if the shortened season started Jan. 15.

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Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.12.2012

646270 Vancouver Canucks

Big hurdles still remain on road to NHL deal

By Ben Kuzma, The Province December 11, 2012

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646271 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks prospect linked to cheating scandal

By Jason Botchford, The Province December 11, 2012

A Canucks draft pick linked to a massive cheating scandal at Harvard is considering his options after withdrawing from the Ivy league school.

Vancouver's fourth-round draft pick in 2010, Patrick McNally needs to play this year. He's 21 years old and coming off a promising first season at Harvard after which he was named to the Eastern College Athletic Conference all-rookie team.

But the puck-moving defenceman won't be playing for Harvard College again in the 2012-13 season.

"He's taking a leave of absence from the university," Canucks assistant general manager Laurence Gilman said. "We cannot speculate on the duration of the absence and will not comment further on the nature of his leave."

The university confirmed McNally and three other players will not be returning this season. A known penalty for academic dishonesty at Harvard requires a student to withdraw from the college for a year.

The team's goalie, Raphael Girard, said this to the university's student newspaper: "Some guys had to take a year absent. I won't say any names, but like any other team, we might have some problems with the academic scandal."

On Aug. 30, Harvard administrators announced an investigation into an estimated 125 students for conspiring to work together to complete a takehome, open-book, "open-Internet" final exam in an undergraduate class, Government 1310: "Introduction to Congress."

The investigation was to be done on a case-by-case basis, which was frustrating for students because it was going to take months, and wasn't expected to finish until late November.

Students have estimated that about half of those accused of cheating were athletes who played varsity sports. Part of that is probably because "Introduction to Congress" was widely known as one of Harvard's easiest courses. At least it was until last year.

Some students accused of cheating have gone to the media to defend themselves, essentially arguing group work was tolerated and widespread.

McNally can return to Harvard in a year.

There were athletes involved in the academic scandal who withdrew before Harvard's fall semester, hoping not to lose a year of eligibility. According to the NCAA rules, athletes who are forced to leave after registering for classes will be out one year of athletic eligibility.

Two of McNally's teammates have already agreed to play in the USHL, the top junior league in the U.S.

After the Canucks drafted McNally, he helped lead his Massachusetts high school, Milton Academy, to the most prestigious championship in American high school hockey. He followed that up with what some call a breakout year at Harvard.

"He's a dynamic prospect," Gilman said. "He's a gifted offensive defenceman. In the year after we drafted him, he had 51 points in 28 games. It was 22 goals and 29 assists.

"We knew he was headed to Harvard and he had 22 points in 29 games there, along with six points in five playoff games.

"He's a good prospect."

McNally was ranked 40th among North American skaters by Central Scouting but it's believed he was passed on by teams because he had another year of prep school in Massachusetts before going to Harvard, where he had already accepted a scholarship.

twitter.com/botchford

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.12.2012

646272 Vancouver Canucks

Gallagher: 20 years of Gary Bettman

By Tony Gallagher, The Province December 11, 2012

Twenty years ago, on Dec. 11, 1992, Gary Bettman was named the first commissioner of the NHL. We thought we'd take a look back at his tenure in this position.

For starters, it probably would have been much wiser to keep the title of president, which was the one held by the man he really succeeded in John Ziegler, although Gil Stein was the temporary holder of the office he actually did inherit.

Because he has functioned as a representative of the owners, you could argue he's done a very nice job, particularly with respect to the increase in value of the various franchises over the length of his reign.

Granted, inflation and the rise of the Canadian dollar (or perhaps more accurately the decay of the U.S. dollar) have had a lot to do with it. The increase in the value of the Vancouver Canucks, for instance, has been nothing short of astonishing.

As such, had his title been president, you'd have to conclude he's done a solid job for the owners, although overall league revenue increases have been rather late to the party in the 20-year reign. And where they would have been under another fellow is anyone's guess.

He's done some other things that warrant a pat on the back, too.

He's been responsible for the expansion of the league by six teams, which means there are that many more hockey-related jobs (management, player, secretary and nearby bar owner and worker etc.) and throughout that expansion he's kept the number of playoff teams the same, against temptation to do otherwise.

This has greatly added to the credibility of the league in terms of competitiveness. Once 16 of 21 teams made the NHL playoffs, now there

are 16 of 30, so that qualification for the post-season has been more a goal for teams rather than a given.

Canadian hockey fans are not overly pleased with the fact that since that first year when the Habs won in 1993, just three months after Bettman officially took office, really before he even knew where all the levers were, a Canadian team hasn't won a Stanley Cup since.

They've been five times to the final, including four Game 7s without a Cup, which is a very odd stat indeed. Just bad luck? You could also commend the helpful Canadian assistance plan to help four of our teams when the dollar was low, but the amount paid was lame and as such, dripping with insincerity.

There's no question Bettman brought a certain professionalism to the position no matter what the title might have been, the old days of Ziegler and NHLPA executive director Alan Eagleson running around doing their thing off the cuff really quite laughable by today's standards.

There's no question there's been an increase in decorum and respectability ushered in by Mr. Bettman and in these last three or four years, a delightful leap in marketing acumen and creativity.

At the other end of the scale, there are some problems with some of those expansion clubs, given they may not have been the best places to put hockey teams.

Much of the increase in revenues — from \$400 million at the time he took over to \$3.3 billion prior to this, the third lockout — has come from inflation and the Canadian dollar.

The much ballyhooed competitive nature of the league is a function of defensive minded coaches, bigger, faster players on the same sized rink and goaltender equipment as much as anything else.

In some ways you could call him a socialist commissioner with most everything done to punish success and reward failure.

You could start with the salary cap in all its many forms, revenue sharing and the attempts to plug any and all ways around the cap no matter how draconian.

The system whereby points are awarded, even for losing in OT, the toleration of clutch and grab for so many years of his time and the ongoing obsession of on-ice officials to keep games close with highly predictable penalty calls also play into this.

For all the modernization of the face of the league that has come about, there are still some genuinely ugly warts.

Colin Campbell remains in a very senior position working with on-ice officials despite the fact he has a son playing in the league.

The appeal process for on-ice discipline is so laughable as to be embarrassing, even for the people it favours, though there have been whispers this might finally change with a new Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The commissioner's relationship with some owners, often with the appearance of a cost to other owners, and the "will we or won't we" compete in the Olympics is also pretty funny, although hardly at the level of the first two. And in this area over 20 years you could get very picky but it's not happening here.

Labour relations speak for themselves. The failure to capitalize on the great 1994 final with the New York Rangers beating the Canucks after that first lockout, the abysmal state of the game the last two or three seasons heading into lockout No. 2 in 2004 as well as the way the game headed in that direction in the second half of last season have also been sore points. Losing a season wasn't great either.

Who knows how someone else may have done. But to be sure Bettman's legacy will be very much more kindly reviewed whenever he does step away if this present squabble ends soon.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.12.2012

646273 Washington Capitals

NHL, NHLPA set to resume negotiations Wednesday

By Katie Carrera, Updated: December 11, 2012

The NHL and NHLPA are scheduled to resume negotiations Wednesday at an undisclosed location in New York. The meeting will mark the first formal session between the two sides since talks broke down last Thursday.

Meanwhile...

 Capitals defenseman Roman Hamrlik has made no secret of wanting to get back on the ice and has been one of the most outspoken players throughout the labor dispute. He spoke with Josh Rimer of Nextsportstar.com on Monday and was asked whether the NHLPA should vote on the latest offer.

"Maybe this week something's going to happen. I'm not against that," Hamrlik said. "This is NHLPA we're talking about stay together. I think it's good. We should maybe do it and we will see how many guys are going to be with or without. I think maybe it's going to happen, I don't know."

Hamrlik went on to say he was against the idea of a secret vote by union members. You can check out the full 13-minute interview in the video below.

- The NHL has said it doesn't want transition rules like amnesty buyouts or limits on escrow in the new collective bargaining agreement. Larry Brooks of the New York Post makes a case for amnesty buyouts.
- Might the NHLPA call upon Jim Quinn, who helped solve last year's NBA lockout? That and 30 thoughts, including many lockout nuggets, from CBC's Elliotte Friedman.
- The Globe and Mail's Roy MacGregor examines the case for a classaction lawsuit by fans against the NHL.
- An unexpected lockout casualty? Karl Alzner's Twitter account. The Capitals defenseman deactivated his account after some not-so-friendly back and forth with followers about the labor dispute.

Washington Post LOADED: 12.12.2012

646274 Winnipeg Jets

Stuart decamps to ECHL, joins Florida Everblades

By: Staff Writer

WINNIPEG Jets defenceman Mark Stuart has left Winnipeg, where he has been working out with teammates during the NHL lockout, and joined the ECHL's Florida Everblades. Stuart, 28, a veteran of five full NHL seasons, makes his Everblades debut tonight in Cincinnati.

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After a stint with Salzberg in the Austrian league, Jets defenceman Toby Enstrom is back in Winnipeq.

Enstrom was at the MTS Iceplex Tuesday working out with his teammates and several other NHLers.

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Mark Scheifele's availability for the entire World Junior tournament remains an ongoing discussion, according to the Winnipeg Jets.

The conversation with Hockey Canada is taking place, the Jets said late Tuesday, on the assumption that their first-round pick of the 2011 draft makes Team Canada, and that the NHL and NHLPA might solve their labour dispute before the tournament ends on Jan. 5.

Late Tuesday, a report appeared on social media that Scheifele had received a "green light" to stay the entire tournament with Team Canada, no matter what the CBA situation.

Asked for confirmation, Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said through his media-relations department on Tuesday night that the decision has not yet been made.

-- Campbell

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.12.2012

646275 Winnipeg Jets

No Jet running his mouth yet

By: Tim Campbell

During the regular course of their jobs, members of the Winnipeg Jets are well-versed in the routine of existence in the NHL.

Like their brethren in 29 other league locales, they play, they practise, they travel and they talk.

Officially, since the NHL's lockout of its players Sept. 15, there's no playing, practising or travelling.

But there remains plenty of talking.

No one from the Jets ascended to the headlines with unthinking remarks, but there are things we have learned about members of the team whom we have encountered during this dark episode league-wide.

Andrew Ladd

The Jets captain no doubt misses his role in the exciting environment of the NHL's newest franchise, but he has not blended into the background while labour issues fester and boil over.

One thing has become very clear about the Maple Ridge, B.C., native, who turns 27 today -- he has strong convictions regarding current matters and he's not backing off.

"I guess with this it's tough, because first of all, you've got to make sure you know what you're talking about," Ladd said this week. "So you have to have a good understanding of what's going on. If I have a good understanding, I have absolutely no problem saying my opinion. If it's something I believe in, I have no problem stating it and standing by it."

Ladd has surely rankled some in his own organization, but they'd be fools to question his captaincy over issues of backbone.

"During the (normal) year, there's such a different ride," Ladd said. "At times, you're trying to keep morale up and you're dealing with different situations like that. In that context, it's a little different than what we're dealing with right now.

"This is probably ramping up, getting a little more emotional as we've gone on here. In hockey, you have a bad game and there's always the next day and you can kind of regroup and get your attitude in check and start over again. This, it's day in and day out the same thing and the same feeling of frustration building into anger, I guess."

Ron Hainsey

The Jets defenceman has become a key figure within the NHLPA, having immersed himself in the issues and onto the players' bargaining committee as it continues the battle with owners.

If you ask around in media circles, Hainsey has run a little hot and cold at times and can be flippant or dismissive. But we all have our off days.

What's important to know is that even though he might have become something of a lightning rod, Hainsey has gained a much-increased level of respect among many of his peers for being willing to stand up for what he believes.

Bryan Little

Last season's overtasked Jets centre is much the same away from the game this fall. There's little thunder and lightning, but you'll never find him backing away from the storm or the challenge, making him a teammate to rely on.

You can tell he leans towards optimistic most days, but isn't afraid of realistic.

"Yeah, I've tried to keep quiet and let guys do their job," Little said of the lockout commentary. "But if somebody asks me a question, I'm going to give them a pretty honest answer. And at the same time, if I have questions or there's something I want to know about, I talk to one of the older guys

that's been there or been in the meetings and has more information than I do... I'm not going to say too much if I don't know what's going on."

Jim Slater

The Jets GST centre also has preferred the optimistic view most days. There's no doubt he's eager to get on with the season, but there hasn't been so much as a hint of dissatisfaction about how the NHLPA has handled things.

"Some more experienced players have a lot riding on this," Slater said.
"This could be the last year, the last couple of years for them. They're more than able to speak their mind. They've played in this league a long time and that's how they feel. But as a collective group, we still have to stay firm and follow what we believe in as a group and keep going with that."

Olli Jokinen

The newly signed July free agent was/is going to upgrade the Jets at centre and he has certainly invested in Winnipeg. He's moved here and so far refused to leave for Europe. All the while, he's a regular participant at the multiple workouts per week with his locked-out fellow players at the Iceplex.

Jokinen was obviously torn early about optimism and pessimism and eventually gave up on talking to reporters many weeks ago, making clear he's got nothing more to say until there's a deal. He's got skin in this game, having lost a complete season in the 2004-05 lockout.

He has also made it clear he will not be part of any whisper campaigns on any issue, that when he's got something to say, he'll attach his name to every word. Mark Stuart

The Jets defenceman was such a warrior for the team all last season, but you'll usually find him fairly reserved and understated off the ice. Same now during the lockout.

He has expressed a strong interest that negotiations, no matter how frustrating, are better than none and he's always been the consummate union teammate.

Evander Kane

Kane has been in Winnipeg only a day or two since the lockout and opted for a stint in the KHL, which ended last month.

The 21-year-old is a frequent participant on Twitter but has not used the platform to make any lockout declarations as others have.

He did a recent interview with the Free Press's Ed Tait and took some ownership of his disappointing time with Dynamo Minsk. After being a focal point in many weeks since the Jets officially moved to Winnipeg -- off-ice controversies, injury, trade rumours, goals-coring, contract negotiations -- Kane has not been so much a centre of attention since signing his big contract Sept. 15.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.12.2012

646276 Winnipeg Jets

WILL JETS BE READY?

By: Gary Lawless

What works for a sprinter does not always apply for a marathon runner, and if there's an NHL season, it will require a different approach than is usually needed to succeed in the world's best hockey league.

There will be no opportunity for a warm-up. Teams will need to hit the ground running and never break stride. Maybe clubs will be able to afford a slight stall, but a prolonged slump in a 48-game season will result in almost certain playoff death.

The Winnipeg Jets, as they are currently constituted, may or may not be a playoff team in a full 82-game season. But some of their deficiencies could be glossed over in a shortened season and maybe they could squeeze into the tournament.

Lots will have to go their way, but if the Jets can stay healthy, get off to a good start and find a way to win some games on the road, maybe there's a chance for some playoff fun around these parts.

The NHL and NHLPA have not agreed to a new CBA and there is still no way to determine whether there will be a season. What we do know is the league has cancelled games up to and including Dec. 30. The league has also stated it is unlikely to play a season that is less than 48 games long. The date most observers agree a 48-game season would have to begin on or around in order to conclude the Stanley Cup by the end of June is Jan. 20.

So on the chance the two sides can get something done in the next month and open seven- to 10-day training camps prior to a season, we've compiled some key storylines for the Winnipeg Jets.

No red lights:

Goaltending will be key in a 48-game schedule. Teams that get strong netminding from the beginning, allowing them to stockpile wins, will have a major edge.

The Jets will have to get over their issues with slated No. 1 Ondrej Pavelec in a hurry. Pavelec was charged and convicted of drunk driving in his native Czech Republic this off-season and has been only so-so in a pair of stints with teams in Europe during the lockout.

Pavelec is facing a sit-down with Jets owner Mark Chipman and GM Kevin Cheveldayoff for hiding his arrest during contract negotiations this past summer. The Jets made a major commitment to Pavelec and only found out afterwards that he had been negotiating in bad faith. This must be cleared up. After that, it will be up to goaltending coach Wade Flaherty to get Pavelec right on the ice. Conditioning has always been a factor for Pavelec, and with a compressed schedule, it will be interesting to see how he holds up.

In the shadows will be backup Al Montoya. Signed as a free agent this summer, Montoya began to live up to some of his promise last season playing in 31 games for the New York Islanders and carrying a .891 save percentage and 3.11 goals-against average. The book on Montoya is he still has some untapped potential.

The expectation will be for Pavelec to be the horse, but in a compressed schedule, there is no time to wait around hoping a player can find his game. The best will play, regardless of contract situations. This is a pot worth watching to see if it might boil over.

Bogo's bumps:

Jets defenceman Zach Bogosian progressed last season to the point where he may soon be this team's leader on the blue-line and have a major say in the dressing room. Bogosian had surgery on his wrist this summer and his status to start the season will have a major impact on the Jets' fortunes.

The recovery period from Bogosian's surgery is four to six months, and if the season were to begin in mid-January, it would be just over the four-month period. Bogosian had a screw removed from his wrist last week and his recovery is said to be on schedule. The fourth-year defender is in full rehab mode at this juncture and how his wrist responds is being closely monitored.

The Jets have so-so depth on the blue-line, but no player in their system is similar to Bogosian, with his mix of physicality, speed and skill.

Dustin's diet:

Dustin Byfuglien is perhaps the most talented of the Jets. Big, powerful and fast, with a hard shot to complement offensive flair, Byfuglien has been an all-star two years running. The Jets believe he could challenge for a Norris Trophy if he could work his fitness to an elite level. Byfuglien's weight has fluctuated throughout his career and has become a constant concern for fans and in the media. The lockout has prevented the Jets from monitoring his fitness, so Byfuglien's arrival for a shortened training camp will draw attention. If he's fit and ready to go, he could be a force from Day 1. If he's out of shape and with no time to catch up, the results could be disastrous for the Jets.

Chemistry set:

The Jets signed a pair of higher-profile free agents this summer -- centre Olli Jokinen and winger Alexei Ponikarovsky -- and coach Claude Noel will need to figure how they fit in with this group in a hurry.

Getting these two up and running and matched with the right linemates will have to happen fast to have the impact the club was hoping for when they put out big money. Veteran players with lots of offensive talent, Noel will want to maximize their impact. Look for Jokinen to centre the team's top line

and for Ponikarovsky to find a perch on the left side of the second or third group, with the potential to grab lots of power-play time.

A slot for Scheifele:

NHL clubs needed to make a declaration to the league prior to the beginning of the lockout on junior players they might access should a season begin.

Barrie Colts centre and 2011 first-round pick Mark Scheifele is the only player the Jets placed on their potential recall list. Scheifele's availability could be affected until after the world junior tournament. But all things being equal, if he's available when and if an NHL camp begins, there's a chance he could have an impact in the early going of a shortened season. With 21 goals and 27 assists in 29 games in the OHL, Scheifele has begun to dominate at the junior level. How that translates to the NHL is still an unknown and the Jets won't try to force his development. If he's ready, he'll stay. If he not, he'll go back. Black and white.

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more lockout coverage D3

If the season started tomorrow, here's our guess on what the Jets' lines would look like:

Forward

First line

LW Evander Kane, C Olli Jokinen, RW Kyle Wellwood

Second line

LW Andrew Ladd, C Bryan Little, RW Blake Wheeler

Third line

LW Alexei Ponikarovsky, C Jim Slater, RW Mark Scheifele

Fourth line

LW Antti Miettinen, C Alex Burmistrov, RW Chris Thorburn

Defence

Dustin Byfuglien, Toby Enstrom

Grant Clitsome, Ron Hainsey

Mark Stuart, Paul Postma

Zach Bogosian (injured)

Goalie

Ondrej Pavelec, Al Montoya

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646277 Winnipeg Jets

Catching up with Claude

By: Staff Writer

Winnipeg Jets coach Claude Noel has been mostly under wraps since the lockout began due to the league's "gag" order but he did address a scrum of reporters Monday before one of his weekly minor-hockey sessions:

JOHN WOODS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS Enlarge Image

Winnipeg Jets coach Claude Noel has been mostly under wraps since the lockout began due to the league's "gag" order but he did address a scrum of reporters Monday before one of his weekly minor-hockey sessions:

WINNIPEG Jets fans grew addicted to healthy doses of Winnipeg Jets coach Claude Noel in the NHL's first season back in the city. Noel has been mostly under wraps since the lockout began due to the league's "gag" order but he did address a scrum of reporters Monday before one of his weekly minor-hockey sessions:

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- -- On emotions going up and down with weeks of labour talks or no talks: "I don't think I'm any different than anybody else, let's put it that way."
- -- On his interim routine: "I go in every day. On weekends, I don't go in, which is new to me. But it's given me an opportunity to meet the True North staff a little more... my fitness level has increased because I have a little more time."
- -- He has seen top prospects Jacob Trouba and Mark Scheifele play this season. On what he thought of Scheifele after the in-person view: "He looks more mature on the ice. It was a game that could have been very frustrating for him to play because they were down, chased the game at 3-0. They ended up losing 3-2 but what I thought was real good in the game was his body language. And I thought he didn't get wrapped into any negative emotion. Not that he did that here but it was there presenting itself and I thought he did a really good job being one of the leaders of that team to continue trying to have positive body language going back to the bench. I really noticed that and spoke to him about that."
- -- On what he's hearing from fans: "I'm hearing from fans the same things that a lot of people are feeling. There's a lot of emotion out there in a lot of ways. I can only say people have been very respectful to me."
- -- On how his Christmas shopping is going: "The Christmas shopping is going OK but I've got a little bit of work to do here. You guys can just hand me your lists before you walk out of here."
- -- Campbell

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.12.2012 646278 Winnipeg Jets

Practising with professionals

By: Tim Campbell

Winnipeg Jets head coach Claude Noel passes on pearls of wisdom to members of the Winnipeg Monarchs bantam team during a practice at the MTS Iceplex Monday.

Many NHL fans refuse to even look for lockout silver linings, but they're there just the same.

Forward Tyler Campbell and defenceman Jordan Steele of the Winnipeg Monarchs bantams are quite jacked about theirs -- so far a couple of Mondays of practice under Winnipeg Jets head coach Claude Noel.

"It felt overwhelming," Jordan, 13, said about his first hour-long session under Noel. "But you get used to it after a while. The pressure kind of stops because you want to do good.

"He's a good coach, good skills coach. Obviously he's in the NHL, so he's a good coach."

Monday's workout at the MTS Iceplex included Noel's new assistant coach Perry Pearn. The focus is less on schemes and more on player improvement.

"It was mainly skills, not too much skating," Jordan said. "He focused on skills. To play hockey, you need to get your skills down. For game situations, you need to know how to shoot a puck and how to pass."

Noel has energy to spare while the NHL is idle, and of the practices he's helped teams with, he said he has a hard time accepting a "la-dee-dah" pace, even if the players aren't in the big leagues.

So has Noel barked at any bantam Monarchs yet?

"No, but I think he yelled at some of the older Monarchs (last week)," Jordan chuckled.

Tyler said he was full of questions before Monday's practice, his first outing with the Jets bench boss.

"He looks like a pretty serious coach, works his players pretty hard, expects the best out of them," Tyler said. "And he obviously coaches the Jets so he's an amazing coach right now.

"(Questions?) Maybe what it's like, the pressure to be in the NHL maybe? If it's really hard, difficult, with all the fans and the media around you all the time?"

Tyler also has things he hopes to learn from the Jets coaches.

"How to be more of a team player, to pass the puck, be a leader," he said. "How to encourage players, help them become better, too. That's what I'd like to learn."

Jordan said he and his teammates were enthused about last week's list of topics.

"We learned how to do a proper saucer pass, different kinds of passing, one-touches and everything," he said. "How to shoot harder. How to have more foot speed."

Even Monarchs coach Adam Rath had his excitement level up.

"I'm going to try to pay attention as much as I can, because for me, this is basically the pinnacle for learning for me," said Rath. "He (Noel) is at the highest level. Someday I might aspire to that. There will be little things that he's teaching the kids and me learning from him. What an opportunity."

Rath said Noel and Pearn designed Monday's practice and the Monarchs players couldn't wait for it to start.

"They're thrilled," Rath said. "They love it. They can't say enough about it because for them, this is the highest level of anyone they'd have to come out to help them. They're loving it. They have so many questions and they want to try to learn so much from them."

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.12.2012

646279 Winnipeg Jets

'Everybody's losing money'

By: Ed Tait

ALMOST three months in the making, hockey owners, players and fans now understand the National Hockey League lockout is a fight with many, many layers.

It's about money and altruistic issues like protecting future generations of players. It's about players not wishing to be pushed around by the owners. And vice versa.

But, ultimately, the catalyst to getting a deal done will be about something much more tangible, something that is being painted bright red with each day the NHL business remains dark:

the mounting financial losses.

More specifically, this thing will end when either side -- or both -- reaches the threshold of losses it is willing to absorb. In fact, if the lockout was akin to a heavyweight fight, both corners must be close to tossing in the towel, what with their combatants busted and bruised and bleeding all over the ring.

The NHL cancelled another chunk of games on Monday, through to Dec. 30, bringing the total to 526 games or 42.8 per cent of the schedule.

Owners are said to be losing \$18-20 million a day; the players have lost a whopping \$558 million to date in salary.

If you don't think even the slightest sign the lockout might be over -- like last week's tease when NHL Players' Association boss Donald Fehr hinted a deal was close -- doesn't lead to some giddy hysteria, think again.

Case in point, we give you Colin Wilson of the Nashville Predators. The Winnipegger, now back home for the holidays, had been skating with about 25 NHLers in Minneapolis. Last week, their session ended around the same time Fehr and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman were doing their duelling-press-conferences act.

"I was sitting there in the dressing room and we were all getting our flights ready to go back to camp," said Wilson. "We all thought the deal was about to be done.

"Like everybody has been saying, I went through a roller-coaster ride of emotions. I went from thinking I'm playing next week and getting ready for training camp to having to wait it out a little bit longer."

While a resumption of talks has not yet been formally announced, it is expected the two sides might get back to the bargaining table this week. Also, many noted that games were cancelled through to Dec. 30, not New Year's Eve, prompting many to speculate -- hope might be a better word -- the league is leaving Dec. 31 open as a potential return date.

But that would take the two sides kissing and making up in a hurry.

And so, in the interim, both camps will continue to bleed.

"It sucks that everybody's losing money. I'm losing money," said Wilson. "But it's for a long-term setup. The 50-50 is bad and a 14 per cent reduction (the NHL's first offer had the players' share of hockey-related revenue dropping to 43 per cent from 57) is bad, but I would have played if it wasn't for the fact I don't want to get bullied by the owners anymore.

"I want to remember this so that when the next CBA comes up we aren't bullied again. Obviously it's about the money, but it's about standing your ground because each year they're going to come back. Record revenues this year and they're telling us they're losing money, so you never know what fable they are going to tell next time."

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The NHL cancellations announced Monday included six Winnipeg Jets games, three of those scheduled for the MTS Centre. They are:

Saturday, Dec. 15 vs. Pittsburgh Penguins Monday, Dec. 17 vs. Columbus Blue Jackets

Thursday, Dec. 20 @ Boston Bruins Friday, Dec. 21 @ Pittsburgh Penguins Wednesday, Dec. 26 @ Edmonton Oilers Saturday, Dec. 29 vs. Buffalo Sabres.

Cancelling games to Dec. 30 includes 16 Jets home games.

SICK BAY UPDATE: Centre Alex Burmistrov, who returned to Winnipeg last week from St. John's to have an upper-body injury examined by the Jets medical staff, will be heading back to Newfoundland this week.

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BLEEDING RED

NHL owners are losing gobs of cash with their arenas dark. Obviously, so too are the players. NHL players were to be paid in 2012-13 on a 185-day season. Through Monday they had lost 61 days or 32.9 per cent of their salaries.

Here's a breakdown of how much members of the Winnipeg Jets would have made this season and how much they have lost:

Player2012-13 salary\$\$\$ Lost

Nik Antropov\$4.75 million\$1,562,750

Andrew Ladd\$4.5 million\$1,480,500

Olli Jokinen\$4.5 million\$1,480,500

Toby Enstrom\$4.5 million\$1,480,500

Dustin Byfuglien\$4.25 million\$1,398,250

Ondrej Pavelec\$3.25 million\$1,069,250

Evander Kane\$3 million\$987,000

Bryan Little\$3 million\$987,000

Ron Hainsey\$3 million\$987,000

Zach Bogosian\$3 million\$0*

Alex Ponikarovsky\$1.8 million\$592,200

Mark Stuart\$1.7 million\$559,300

Jim Slater\$1.6 million\$526,400

Kyle Wellwood\$1.6 million\$526,400

Antti Miettinen\$1.5 million\$493,500

Grant Clitsome\$1.4 million\$460,600

Alex Burmistrov\$900,000\$296,100

Chris Thorburn\$850,000\$279,650

Al Montoya\$601,000\$197,729

Paul Postma\$550,000\$180,950

NOTE: All numbers courtesy capgeek.com and based on base salary, not including signing bonuses

*Injured players like Bogosian still receive full salary

Locked-out NHLers on one-way NHL deals like Postma had to sign AHL deals in order to play in the minors.

Burmistrov's AHL salary this year is \$67,500.

Antropov has played 23 games with Astana Barys of the KHL.

Ponikarovsky has played 25 games with Donbass of the KHL.

Pavelec has played 14 games with Liberec of the Czech Extraliga and six games with Lahti in Finland.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.12.2012

646280 Winnipeg Jets

Lockout 'ridiculous': Dennis Hull

Brandon Logan For the Winnipeg Sun

With talks to end the 90-day-old lockout set to re-start Wednesday, former Chicago Blackhawk great Dennis Hull weighed in on the state of the NHL.

Even as a retired player, Hull isn't picking sides in this battle between the league and players association. Instead, like many fans, he just wants to watch the game that he loves.

"I miss watching hockey," said Hull, during a special appearance Tuesday night in Winnipeg. "I think it's really ridiculous that it's taken this long to get a deal done. The players are losing a lot of money. I know they're millionaires, but the owners are billionaires, and I think the owners can hold out a lot longer than they can.

"I think if they can get close to a deal they want, they should take it because they have lost a lot of salary already."

Throughout the process, many NHLPA members have talked about signing a deal that can protect future players. Hull thinks that they should be worrying about former players and not future ones.

"I heard one player said he's worried about the players of the future," said Hull. "I said, 'C'mon, that guy is going to make more money than you are.' Worry about the guys from the past; never mind the guys from the future.

"The way I look at it, every deal that's ever been made with the owners, it seems to me that the players always get paid. I don't remember the salaries ever going down. They're always going up."

Joining Hull at the Red River Exhibition Park's Winter Wonderland was Winnipeg Jets' captain Andrew Ladd.

While it's the status quo for the most part, Ladd sees Wednesday's meetings as a step in the right direction — especially after last week's blowup from both sides.

"I think anytime we're meeting, it's a positive thing," said Ladd, while signing autographs for Winnipeg youngsters.

"From our side, we have always pushed to continue meeting no matter what the issues are and that's the only way it's going to get done.

"Hopefully tomorrow's a big day to getting a resolution."

While he wouldn't hint at if the sides were close, if a shortened season does start in January, Ladd is as close to game shape as he possibly can be.

"I think you can train as much as you want, but until you start playing games, that's when you get into game shape," he said. "I've been skating and working out since September."

And although he wasn't as vocal as Hull, Ladd just wants to get back to playing the game he was born and raised on.

"I'm definitely ready to start playing some games."

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 12.12.2012

646281 Winnipeg Jets

Jets would be big question mark in short season

By Paul Friesen ,Winnipeg Sun

If the NHL lockout ends in time for a short season — and I still believe it will — what will the Winnipeg Jets look like?

The Jets, arguably more than any other team, would be loaded with question marks for that kind of scenario, and head coach Claude Noel said as much during his session with the media the other day.

"They could be all over the map," Noel said of his players, and he wasn't talking about the fact the Jets are scattered from Astana, Kazakhstan, to Hameenlinma, Finland, to Vancouver, and several points in between.

He was referring to how ready they'll be to jump quickly into a high-pressure run at a playoff spot, with a season as short as 48 games.

The rule of thumb is if you're playing competitively somewhere, in Europe or North America, you'll be better prepared to hit the ground running.

Jets defenceman Mark Stuart obviously subscribes to that theory, signing with Florida in the ECHL this week after a couple months of skating locally.

Defenceman Toby Enstrom went the opposite direction, joining a handful of teammates at the Iceplex, Tuesday, after a mediocre stint in Austria.

Four Jets remain in leagues overseas, while several who potentially could be on the opening-day roster are with the Jets AHL farm team in St. John's.

Those might be the lucky ones in a potential one-week training camp.

Don't think Paul Postma, Derek Meech or Zach Redmond will have a step on Grant Clitsome if they hit the ice in January?

Grinder Chris Thorburn better be skating his tail off in Sault Ste. Marie, or wherever he is, because he's going to have a few sturdy Jets farmhands to contend with.

Nearly half the team is out of town and out of sight. Unable to contact them because of the lockout rules, the Jets can only wonder how much they're skating, how hard they're working.

"I'm not so sure we're built for a sprint or not," Noel said. "I can see the challenges."

There's no bigger question mark than the one behind the mask.

Ondrej Pavelec, fresh off a drunk driving conviction in his native Czech Republic (which he kept quiet from the Jets during his contract negotiation),

signed a new five-year, \$19.5-million deal, then proceeded to play like a two-bit minor-leaguer in Europe.

Evander Kane pulled a similar act in the KHL, minus the lousy decision behind the wheel.

Others adjusted just fine to life overseas, Blake Wheeler probably the best example, although the German league is a long way from the NHL.

By our count, nine Jets haven't played a single competitive game since last April.

Can you afford to play them right off the hop, waiting for them to get in game shape, or will coaches lean towards those who've been in full battle mode all along?

"You've got seven or eight players playing, you have junior players that could potentially go back into your lineup that have been playing," Noel said.

One junior, anyway.

Mark Scheifele, currently tearing it up with Barrie in the Ontario Junior League, impressed the coach in his last look-see a couple weeks back.

"He looked stronger, he looked like he's picked up a step," Noel said. "He looks more mature on the ice."

By the time training camp rolls around, Scheifele could be fresh off the World Junior Championship, which qualifies him for an NHL job more than a friendly game of three-on-three at the local rink.

Going into the season, the prevailing wisdom was Scheifele would do well by another year in junior.

The lockout, as we know, has knocked prevailing wisdom right over the boards

It's going to knock some teams on their behinds, too.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 12.12.2012

646282 Winnipeg Jets

Winnipeg Jets defenceman Mark Stuart signs with ECHL team

Winnipeg Sun

Another member of the Winnipeg Jets has taken a job in another league during the lockout.

Defenceman Mark Stuart has joined the Florida Everblades of the ECHL, the team announced today.

Stuart joins fellow NHL defenceman Ryan O'Byrne of the Colorado Avalanche on the Everblades.

A Rochester, Minn., native, Stuart appeared in 80 games with the Jets last season, recording three goals, 14 assists.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 12.12.2012

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ESPN / Moderates push NHL, NHLPA back to table

By Pierre LeBrun

With considerable push from both owners and players behind the scenes, the NHL and NHL Players' Association will be back at it Wednesday.

The moderates on each side were working the phones all weekend long, sources told ESPN.com, pushing like crazy for both sides to resume talks,

back-channelling between owners, agents and players stressing the need to get right back at it in an effort to once and for all end a lockout that should have never lasted this long.

And even then, there's still no guarantee it's going to work, although I will maintain that both sides are not that far apart on a deal.

Just who would be in the room was going to be finalized Tuesday by the NHL and NHLPA, with sources indicating the league was leaning toward no owners this time, while the union may still invite players. But sources said federal mediators will be involved again.

Among those working behind the scenes to try to get things back on track has been New York Rangers owner James Dolan and Pittsburgh Penguins owner Ron Burkle, sources said.

While there technically is not supposed to be direct communication between players and owners, it's hard to believe that hasn't been happening. With the season on the line and moderates on both sides refusing to give up and see the industry suffer an unmitigated disaster if there's no season for the second time in eight years, there's all kinds of dialogue going on to pressure both Gary Bettman and Don Fehr into taking another stab at this.

That both sides have yet to name the location, and perhaps they won't, is annoying for the media, but sources indicate it's reflective of the league's belief that last week's drama-filled events in New York -- with play-by-play by the media on site -- didn't help the process.

As many fans have been saying for weeks, both sides should just hide away and emerge only once a deal is done.

Perhaps they'll get their wish this week.

Ottawa-based sports labor lawyer Eric Macramalla was skeptical that mediation would be effective given the history of pro sports labor disputes.

But the partner in Gowlings, a national law firm, did express surprise at the league's efforts to cut NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr out of the process.

"One thing that is really interesting is how the NHL has sought to exclude Fehr from the negotiation process -- that amounts to trying to dramatically change the conditions of negotiations. However, Fehr is here to stay. He's also old school labor law, and as a result, I suspect doesn't take kindly to attempts to undermine the union as bargaining agent for the players," Macramalla told ESPN.com in an email Tuesday afternoon.

That said, the lawyer believes the two sides should be able to hammer out their differences sooner than later.

"While logically this should settle within seven days, these negotiations have been filled with surprises. So it's tough to know how things will shake out," Macramalla wrote.

-- Scott Burnside

ESPN LOADED: 12.12.2012

646284 Websites

ESPN / Couture: Back-and-forth rips your heart out

By Pierre LeBrun

Like any hockey fan, Logan Couture was glued to the tube on Thursday watching the theatrics and dueling news conferences between the NHL and the players' association, his emotions thrown for a loop when he first thought a deal was possible, only to see talks blow up by the end of the day.

"It was tough to watch it unfold," Couture told ESPN.com Monday night. "I was watching it all on TSN like I'm sure a lot of people were. You're so happy at one point, but two minutes later it feels like your heart is ripped out of you."

Couture, who returned home to London, Ontario, from playing in Switzerland the day before the theatrics, like the other players, was told things were close from NHLPA executive director Don Fehr in his Thursday

evening news conference, but then got a different version on TV from NHL commissioner Gary Bettman.

"It's definitely tough," said the San Jose Sharks center. "We hear stuff from guys in the meetings and from Don. There was a real belief from our guys that a deal was close and that it would happen last week."

Talks are to resume Wednesday between the league and players' union, potentially the final push before this deal is finally done. The alternative -- no NHL season -- is a mind-boggling possibility for the 23-year-old Couture, who played in his first NHL All-Star Game last season.

"From what we've heard, our view I think as a union is that we're close to getting a deal done," Couture said. "It's tough to hear [the NHL's] view on it, but hopefully they change their mind over the next little while before it's too late. Because the game has made some great strides over the last few years, especially in some U.S. cities. It would be tough to miss an entire year."

If the puck drops on a shortened NHL season, Couture feels he's in good game shape and ready to roll. He put up 23 points (7 goals, 16 assists) and a plus-10 with Geneva but decided he had enough, playing his last game Nov. 30 and deciding to come home to spend some time with family and wait out the start of the NHL season.

"I went over there to get into shape and it got to the point where I figured I was," said the two-time 30-goal NHL scorer. "I felt good over there. Obviously, it's much different than the NHL, but there's still some pretty good players playing in that league over there. It's a good league. I felt ready for this season to start over here."

Now he needs to find a good option to skate while he waits out an NHL labor resolution.

"I really don't have a plan to skate yet, probably going to try and catch on with the [Ontario Hockey League's] London Knights here and skate with them." said Couture.

Meanwhile, Couture hasn't been shy during the lockout to voice his opinion via Twitter on the lockout. He's proud of the fact the players have stuck together during this long process, crediting Fehr early on for setting the tempo with the membership.

"And another reason I think the players have stuck together is because a lot of different guys have sat in on the meetings with the NHL," said Couture. "When you sit in on one of those, and you listen to what we have to say and they have to say, it's frustrating."

Well, Couture certainly has the worst possible experience of that, witnessing firsthand the NHL's first shot across the bow in July, an offer that asked players to go down from 57 percent of hockey-related revenue to 43 percent.

"Yeah, I was there for the July 13 proposal the NHL gave us," said Couture. "That really rubbed me the wrong way the way they approached that.

"We've done some giving back, which was needed because some teams are in financial trouble, but they also have to give us some incentive as well, I feel. We're all just hoping a deal gets done soon."

Don't we all.

ESPN LOADED: 12.12.2012

646285 Websites

NBCSports.com /Mayers: NHL "never, ever" said \$100 million came with conditions

Jason Brough

More evidence that communication (or lack thereof) may have been a factor in the breakdown of last week's players-owners CBA negotiations:

According to Blackhawks forward Jamal Mayers, who was in the room for the talks, the NHL "never, ever" said its willingness to add \$100 million to the so-called "make whole" fund was tied to the NHLPA accepting 1) five-year contract limits, 2) a 10-year CBA, and 3) agreeing to various transition issues.

"It wasn't presented to us for the transition payment/make whole, that they're tied together to everything else," Mayers told CSNChicago.com. "That was never, ever said in any of the meetings. So that comes as a surprise."

On Thursday, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly called the league's proposal a "package deal" and that the union couldn't just "cherry-pick" certain items

Given all of the above, perhaps it's a good thing mediators will be present when the two sides get together again tomorrow. Clearly a few things need to be clarified.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 12.12.2012

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NBCSports.Report: NHLPA dropped demand for "aftermath" protection

Jason Brough

Remember when the NHLPA wanted protection from the "aftermath" of the lockout? Well, it still probably wants it, but it's no longer demanding it, according to Yahoo! Sports.

The NHL Players' Association backed off on its proposal that the players' share could not go backwards in terms of dollars starting in Year 2. It had been a non-starter for the NHL.

Basically, under the players' previous proposal, their combined pay would drop in Year 1 as their percentage of hockey-related revenue dropped from 57 to 50. After that, their combined pay would never be less than the previous year, even if HRR went down.

The NHL understandably wanted no part of the PA's proposal given the uncertain future of a league that's suffering through its third work stoppage in 20 years, not to mention the tenuous state of the economy.

"There is no way to predict," said commissioner Gary Bettman when asked how long it would take for the NHL to recover from the work stoppage.

Yahoo! is also reporting the NHLPA proposed a limited mid-level cap exception, similar to the one in the NBA (that made Drew Gooden rich) as a way to ease the squeeze on the league's middle class that the players have argued will be a consequence of max length contracts. (The league isn't convinced of the argument.)com /

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 12.12.2012

646287 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / On Spec: Third mediation's a charm?

Mark Spector

NEW YORK - We were going to post this column in a secret, "undisclosed" location. So we wouldn't have the distraction of readers actually scrolling through our precious work and passing judgment.

Then we would explain our move with some statement about how the comments at the bottom of the column are "not helpful to the process." Some, in fact, are (sniffle) hurtful.

But then we realized that, you know, if you can't find the column then, well, you probably wouldn't read it. Then it would be sort of, you know, a waste of our time and...

Yeah...

Three Time's a Charm

So we're back to mediation, the third time the league and its union has attempted to have someone haul their infinite labour dealings to common ground. In 2005 mediation failed and the season was cancelled three days

later, while it was also attempted earlier this season in a process that made us all familiar with the name Guy Serota.

When asked about mediation last week in New York, Gary Bettman stated, "We're not interested in mediation. We went through it a week and a half ago; it was of no value because of the position of the parties."

Yet on Tuesday, Bill Daly said this, in an email to the Washington Times: "It was our position that they would not have been of value at that particular part of the process. We are in a different place now than we were a week ago today."

So, the league office has steadfastly refused to admit that the two sides are close to ending this lockout, or that any real progress is being made at all. If they were far apart however, and this is "a different place" from there, doesn't that mean they are closer?

Alas, only the boys from America's Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service will know for sure. FMCS mediator Scot Beckenbaugh will attend tomorrow's session.

Good luck, fellas. Hopefully it's third time lucky.

Our Hill

OK, let's get something straight: Contracts will not be limited to five years in duration. And that prediction is a hill (wait for it...) I am willing to die on.

The league that gave us Rick Dipietro (15 years, \$67.5 million), Vincent Lacavalier (11 years, \$85 million), an \$18 million Christian Ehrhoff (\$10 million salary, \$8 million signing bonus), and duelling 13-year deals in Minnesota, is not going to get contract terms back down to a five-year max (seven years for re-signing your own player) -- period.

Won't happen.

"It's a philosophical battle," agent J.P. Barry said on Monday. "The players want a more free-market place, and the owners just keep tacking on restrictions. Five-year term is just putting another curtailment into place."

Players worry that the stars' salaries will shoot up into the teens under a five-year max, leaving far less money for the mid-level player. "Typical red herring," said a GM. "If that's true, then put in a contract limit like we have now, of 20 per cent of the cap. Put your money where your mouth is."

Said another agent: "Sure. That's saying, 'If you want flexibility, then have less flexibility.' How ridiculous is that? It is just adding another prohibition."

While we're wondering, I've been asking this question for some time now, without ever getting a satisfying answer:

If the NHL is OK with allotting 50 per cent of revenues to the NHLPA -- a defined number that cannot change through individual player contract negotiations -- then why does the league care how that money is split up among the players? Who cares if 10 players get 80 per cent of the money?

We're still asking.

Not Goodenow

One mistake the league is making here is the strategy of trying to alienate Donald Fehr from NHLPA membership. It worked last time with Bob Goodenow, but only because the league's economy was so messed up --with 75 per cent going to the players -- that Goodenow had to pitch a two-season work stoppage to his players to preserve that. It was an impossible task for the union leader, and fuel for a mutiny.

Today, the fight isn't even worth missing one season over. And after living through the fallout of Goodenow's ouster last time, there is no chance the players implode again -- at least not until the season has officially been cancelled by the league.

So portraying to the players that bringing Fehr back into negotiations would hinder things, as Winnipeg's Ron Hainsey said was the case last week in New York, is bad form by the owners.

"I think it is another one of their tactics to try and discredit Don, to say he is the one standing in the way of a deal," Manny Malhotra told the Vancouver Province. "I can't say enough about how strongly we feel about his leadership and what he has done for this organization so far. He's the professional, he has been doing this for years and to think that we'd be dotting the I's and crossing the T's without him in the room is just absurd."

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Wall Street Journal / Trapped in the Neutral Zone

By JOSHUA ROBINSON

Chicago Blackhawks center Patrick Kane may have won the Stanley Cup, but he's currently playing for an obscure team in Switzerland as the NHL player lockout continues. The good news? Swiss fans are loving it. WSJ's Joshua Robinson reports.

Biel, Switzerland

Were it not for his car, Patrick Kane would get around town here without ever tipping anyone off that he is an NHL star for the Chicago Blackhawks. But once the locals see his ride, they know. In Biel, it just smacks of hockey player—mainly because it's a Skoda station wagon with the Biel hockey team's logo plastered across the side.

So when he steps out of it, people realize that he must be one of Biel's two NHL refugees, Kane or the Boston Bruins' Tyler Seguin. The fans just don't know which is which.

"They want to talk to you and ask if you're Kane or Seguin," Kane said last week

They are just two of the 26 NHL players who came to Switzerland this fall while they wait for the lockout to end. The owners and the NHL Players Association have been deadlocked since Sept. 16. On Monday the league canceled games through Dec. 30.

What sets the 24-year-old Kane apart from the other players, aside from his status as a former NHL Rookie of the Year and Stanley Cup winner, is that when he came to Europe, he imported a support network: his mom.

"And when I got here, I was like, 'There's just no way," Donna Kane said. "I cook for him every day. There's only like five stations on television. There's not much really to do. It's kind of lonely."

Kane arrived in Switzerland in early November because he wanted a place to play in case the NHL season was canceled completely. He picked it over offers from higher-caliber leagues in Sweden and Russia, he said, because Sweden was only taking players if they committed to staying the whole season and, "going to Russia's almost scary."

Patrick Kane has notched 15 points in his 14 games with EHC Biel of the Swiss league.

"I knew nothing about the city, to be honest," Kane said, adding that he had only been to Zurich with the Blackhawks for two exhibitions in 2010. "I wasn't really sure what to expect, but it's a totally different world."

Here are some facts about Biel: The town, also known as Bienne, has a population just over 50,000. Detroit Red Wings legend Chris Chelios played three games here during the 1994 lockout. And Biel's inhabitants are so thoroughly bilingual that even the street signs are in two languages.

Unfortunately for Kane, neither of those is English.

Still, his lack of German and French skills hasn't prevented him from communicating with his teammates or his coaches, who run practices by simultaneously translating from German to English.

"It was a dream to get him," said general manager Martin Steinegger, who spent 22 years as a defenseman in the top Swiss league. "If you look at Patrick's hands, it's unbelievable. I've never seen such good hands with the puck."

Biel is under .500 since Kane arrived, but he has 15 points in 14 games. It's an excellent return, but not nearly enough to earn him the team's top-scorer helmet, which is painted up with orange flames like a motorcycle.

That belongs to Seguin for now. He gets to wear it during games, along with a special jersey that says, "Top Scorer" across the back instead of his name. "Some of the guys back home want me to sneak [the helmet] out of here," Seguin said.

When that call to go home eventually comes, Kane said he will have three days to gather his things and get back to Chicago, which shouldn't take too long since he only packed for about two weeks.

"I'm really surprised I've been here this long," he said.

For a month now, Kane and his mother have lived in a modern three-bedroom on the edge of the forest about five minutes from the rink. It's the first time she has lived with her son since he left home for junior hockey at the age of 14. And the apartment is so Spartan that one of the bedrooms remains totally empty.

Between them, the Kanes brought only his hockey bag, some sticks and three suitcases: one's for him, one's for her and the third is essentially America in a Bag. Among its contents are cereal bars, Kraft Macaroni & Cheese, a raft of bestselling novels and, of course, a book about Tim

Biel's practices and home games unfold in a 40-year old arena that isn't much warmer than the winter outside. The locker rooms are so tight that the skates are stored in racks screwed to the ceiling. Players have to squeeze past the giant heaters recirculating that hockey gear smell.

Kane called the setup reminiscent of his days as a junior in the Ontario Hockey League.

Like in juniors, Kane carries his own bags and takes buses to and from every road game, never staying anywhere overnight. He also supplied most of his own gear. And when he needed to order an extra 36 sticks, they came straight from Bauer in North America in a matter of days. (Biel's equipment manager is still amazed at how quickly they showed up. His orders usually take about seven weeks.) "You take certain things for granted being in Chicago," Kane said. "It's really opened my eyes."

Back home, Kane has a reputation for partying and creating "distractions" away from the ice, most famously a dustup with a Buffalo cabdriver in 2009.

In Biel with his mother, he has been a homebody. Most evenings after practice, they stay in and watch movies or American television shows on a laptop. Even on days off, he barely leaves the place, and that is mainly to work out at the arena. Donna finds it challenging to stave off boredom—she hardly knows anyone here and her husband and three daughters are back home in Buffalo. But for now she sees it as part of her job as a hockey mom.

It's a small price to pay for someone used to seeing her son play in person more than 40 times a year. For home games, she drives him to the rink before going into the stands across from Biel's bench. She watches from the edge of her seat, texting updates home to Buffalo with every goal.

"We're not here on a vacation," she added. "We're here for him to play hockey."

Kane had been waiting to do that all summer. As soon as he landed here, he had Steinegger drive him to the rink. He wanted to skate. So Steinegger obliged and sent him on the ice with whoever was there. That just happened to be EHC Biel's mosquito team of 10-year-olds.

Since then, he has also shared the ice with a number of NHL players. Last Friday night, when Biel faced the Rapperswil-Jona Lakers, he matched up against the New York Rangers' Michael Del Zotto and the Ottawa Senators' Jason Spezza. Their in-game interactions amounted to little more than Del Zotto shouting at Kane and Seguin that he was closing in on them. "A courtesy," Seguin said.

They followed up the game with some lockout commiseration. The word "contract" repeatedly floated out of their huddle. They didn't have much to go on beyond their daily updates from NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr and a few texts from players back home.

But Kane wasn't part of the discussion. He was already out the door and through the scrum of fans. His mom was waiting for him in the car.

Wall Street Journal LOADED: 12.12.2012

646289 Websites

YAHOO SPORTS / No excuses: There's a deal to be done, and it's time for NHL and NHLPA to do it

Cover your ears, and open your eyes. Don't listen to the hope or the gloom or the he-said, she-said sniping. Look at what is on the table – or at least was on the table, before the NHL pulled its latest offer in a fit of anger and theater last week. Ignore the spin, and look at the facts.

The NHL needs to put its last CBA proposal back on the table. (AP)What do you see?

I see a deal, or at least a path to one. I see a negotiation that should be in its final stages when the NHL and the NHL Players' Association resume talks Wednesday, with federal mediators rejoining the process. I see no excuse – none, nada, zero, zilch – for the season to be canceled. I see no hills on which to die here, not anymore, only the point of diminishing returns.

Is there any battle left to be won that is worth the sacrifice of the season? Of course not.

Which is why some teams are quietly telling staffers to get ready. Which is why more players are popping up at practice rinks. They say it means nothing, and technically that's true: Only the tight inner circles on each side really know the next moves. No one wants to seem too eager and project weakness, either. But whether it's optimism or just-in-case preparation or educated guessing, this is not just wishful thinking. It better not be wishful thinking.

The sides aren't as close as NHLPA executive director Don Fehr made them seem last week. But they aren't as far apart as NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly made them seem. At this point, if the deal doesn't get done, if the lockout doesn't end by mid-January at the latest, it won't be because of principles or economics. It will be because the leadership (bleeped) it up.

There has been too much time spent – no, time wasted – on the personalities and politics. You know what? Both sides shift their priorities. Both move their targets. Both pocket one thing and ask for more. Both try to discredit the other. Both use slick tricks. They just do it at different times, in different degrees, in different ways. This is bare-knuckles stuff with bigmoney stakes.

And yeah, that has led to a lot of disrespect and downright hatred, and that has had a tangible effect. It will continue to have a tangible effect if the NHL doesn't put its last offer back on the table – or if it puts only some of it back on the table, driving the sides farther apart.

But that's why it makes sense to bring back the mediators now. Even though mediation failed two weeks ago, even though everything blew up last week, the sides are closer now than they were before. They are close enough to finish this.

Maybe with the help of a third-party perspective, they can put pride aside, keep things quiet and focus on the issues themselves. Maybe with a smaller group, there will be less miscommunication. Maybe they can admit what should be obvious:

– They aren't as close as Fehr made them seem: Many owners think the players shouldn't receive 50 percent of hockey-related revenue, even though the players made 57 percent before. More owners think the players shouldn't receive 50 percent plus \$300 million in "make-whole" or transition payments. Suggest adding additional money outside the system via compliance buyouts or a cap on escrow, and there is going to be pushback.

The NHLPA can't risk pushing the league too far as the two sides close in on an agreement. (Getty)Bettman and Daly have bluffed before. They have made their best offers, only to make them better, multiple times. But at some point, they might not be bluffing anymore and their offers really might get worse. "Close" is subjective. "Close" takes two. If the owners pull back, then what?

There is also a ton of fine print to write. Just two examples: As far as the NHL knows, the NHLPA is still proposing a minimum salary cap of \$67.25 million. The NHLPA is still proposing the cap and floor be plus and minus 20 percent of the midpoint, widening the salary range. The league wants the cap to be set at \$60 million for two years, then to reflect what it feels is a true 50-50 split. It wants the cap and floor set at a smaller percentage of the midpoint, so the salary range stays tight – so the rich cannot outspend the poor too much while the poor don't have to keep up with the rich.

In short, there is still a lot of haggling to be done.

 They aren't as far apart as Bettman and Daly made them seem: The owners have already won the biggest prize. Not only have they gotten the players to stay within the salary-cap system, they have gotten them to drop their demand for guaranteed shares and accept 50 percent of HRR. They got them to agree to a make-whole/transition amount. So if the owners put that \$300 million back on the table, the major money issue is solved.

Now we're down to how the money is allocated among the players. The dynamics are complicated, not simple, and no one can predict exactly how the system will work and evolve. But no matter what the GMs and agents do in the future, the owners are protected. They will never pay the players more than 50 percent of HRR after a transition period. And no matter how this negotiation ends up, the system will be more restrictive anyway.

The owners have gotten the players to accept maximum contract lengths and flatter structures, and there isn't much difference between proposals, especially relative to where they were before. The owners want contracts limited to five years but will go as long as seven for teams to re-sign their own players; the players are at eight years. The owners want salaries to vary by no more than five percent year to year; the players want to use existing rules put in after the Ilya Kovalchuk dispute and require the lowest year be at least 25 percent of the highest year. The NHLPA also has proposed a way to address back-diving, cap-circumventing deals. If a player retires early, a formula would turn the previous cap advantage into a penalty.

If the point is to keep long-term liabilities off the books and stop back-diving, cap-circumventing contracts, mission accomplished, either way or anywhere in between. If the point is to stop giving too much to the wrong guys ... well, that's mission impossible. There will be human error in any system. But at worst, mistakes will be able to haunt only so long. There won't be another Rick DiPietro deal.

As for the length of the CBA, the owners have gotten the players to go long. While the league proposed 10 years with an opt-out after eight last week, the players proposed eight years with an opt-out after six – when the league had been at six or seven years and the players five.

In short, what are they fighting about again?

 Enough is enough: Look at the big picture. Under the old collective bargaining agreement, there was financial imbalance – with the top teams thriving and others struggling – amid perhaps the best competitive balance in sports.

Now look at the situation. Under this CBA – no matter whose proposal you choose as is, if the NHL's last one is still valid – the owners and players will split HRR 50-50 after transition, as the owners targeted from the start, and the system will be more restrictive.

Team HRR is not league HRR, so weaker teams still might spend more than 50 percent of their revenue on players' salaries even though the league won't as a whole. That's why contracting rules are so important to the league, and why everything is tied together. But wouldn't the damage of canceling the season outweigh the damage of fighting for more concessions, even to the weaker teams, maybe especially to the weaker teams? Is any system airtight? Aren't we close enough?

Shouldn't the league be healthy financially? Shouldn't the competitive balance be as good or better? Wasn't that the goal?

It's time to iron out the details and get it done. There is little left to gain for anyone but a lot left to lose for everyone. Close your ears, open your eyes and keep your eye on the ball – or the puck, if you can still find it.

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