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Anaheim Ducks 646290

Mediation meetings don't help NHL talks

Staff and wire reports

The latest round of NHL labor talks ended with the two sides in different

The players' association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million, it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three non-negotiable points. Instead, the players accepted the raise in funds, but then made counterproposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

ETC.

Sanchez Sola is new Chivas USA coach

Former Mexican League coach Jose Luis Sanchez Sola was selected as the new coach of Chivas USA, the troubled Major League Soccer team that hasn't made the playoffs in three seasons.

Sanchez Sola, 53, formerly ran the youth program and then the first-division Mexican team in Puebla, reaching the Clausura semifinals in 2009. With Chivas USA he replaces Robin Fraser, who won 15 games in two years,

suffering through a franchise-worst 14-game winless streak to end last season.

—Kevin Baxter

Skip Schumaker passed a physical examination to finalize his trade to the Dodgers from the St. Louis Cardinals.

In exchange for the 32-year-old utility man, the Dodgers sent the Cardinals light-hitting double-A shortstop Jake Lemmerman. The Dodgers designated Scott Van Slyke for assignment to clear a spot on the 40-man roster for

Schumaker, a career .288 hitter, is expected to provide the Dodgers with depth at second base and all three outfield positions.

-Dylan Hernandez

The blockbuster trade that sent Adrian Gonzalez, Josh Beckett and Carl Crawford from Boston to the Dodgers in August will wrap up with the Red Sox paying \$11.7 million to the Dodgers over the next three years.::

Texas Tech brought back former Red Raiders quarterback Kliff Kingsbury to become the head football coach.

Kingsbury was the offensive coordinator at Texas A&M, coaching Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Manziel this year, and was the first in a string of record-setting quarterbacks for the Red Raiders under former coach Mike Leach.

He has never been a head coach and at 33, he'll be one of the youngest in major-college football.

::An internal investigation into a former player's allegations of abuse by Washington State football coaches didn't turn up any evidence of such abuse, Athletic Director Bill Moos said.

A dozen players were interviewed by two members of Moos' staff, and all reported they were having a positive experience at Washington State under Leach, the head coach, and his assistants, Moos said.

Star receiver Marquess Wilson quit the team during a practice late in the season and later contended that players were suffering physical and mental abuse by coaches.

::Alabama guarterback AJ McCarron, who has led the Crimson Tide to its second straight national title game, said he will return for his senior season instead of making himself available for the NFL draft.

::Sacramento center DeMarcus Cousins was suspended for one game without pay by the NBA for striking Dallas' O.J. Mayo in the groin area in the Kings' road loss Monday night.

Cousins sat out the Kings' game Wednesday night at Milwaukee.

::Abby Wambach scored twice to become only the second American woman to reach 150 international goals, and the United States beat China, 4-0, in a soccer exhibition at Houston.

LA Times: LOADED: 12.13.2012 646291 Anaheim Ducks

Checking in on current and future Ducks II

posted by Eric Stephens,

inDucks Blog has been following the lockout proceedings off the ice from beginning to ... well, there really isn't an end yet. It is more like an endless loop that is now on Day 88.

Last week, we began to devote some space to those who are actually playing games against others where wins and losses are at stake. This blog has been chronicling how the Ducks' American Hockey League affiliate in Norfolk is faring game by game but in this post, we're going to look at how some current and would-be Ducks are doing elsewhere.

It is only a bare-bones statistical breakdown so there won't be categories such as faceoff percentage, fighting majors or time on ice. Not yet at least. But we plan on running an update of these numbers in this space each

week, especially as this lockout drags on. We'll add some players and remove others.

By the way, Ducks Blog does hope that it can one day delete the overseas portion of this post. Again, enjoy.

NORFOLK ADMIRALS (AHL)

		` ,					
minus	Games	Goals	Assist	Points	PIM	Plus-	
Peter Holl	land, C -3	22	10	13	23	37	
Emerson	Etem, RW +1	22	6	1	7	4	
Sami Vata	anen, D -3	21	3	11	14	24	
Hampus L	_indholm, D 10) +2	19	1	4	5	
Kyle Palm	nieri, RW -9	22	9	8	17	42	
Devante S	Smith-Pelly 30	, LW-RW -8	22	2	8	10	
Patrick Ma	aroon, LW -1	22	6	8	14	46	
Chris Wa	gner, C +5	21	2	7	9	18	
Brandon I	McMillan, L' 24	W -2	22	3	3	6	
	Games SV%	Wins Shutouts	Losses	OT/SO Lo	sses	GAA	
Igor Bobk	ov, G .886	9 1	3	6	0	3.99	
Frederik A	Andersen, C 2.38	ਤੇ .928	15 0	7	6	0	
OTHER PROSPECTS							
OTHERP	ROSPECT	S					
minus	Games	Goals	Assist	Points	PIM	Plus-	
minus	_	Goals		Points	PIM 13	Plus-	
minus Rickard R	Games	Goals V, Plymoutl 12	n (OHL) +12	30			
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Luca Sbisa, D, Lugano (Swiss NLA) 11 10 -3	25	5	6				
Matt Beleskey, LW, Coventry (EIHL) 24 37 0	19	8	16				
Bobby Ryan, LW-RW, Mora (Allsvenskan 6 4 -6) 5	5	1				
Cam Fowler, D, Sodertalje (Allsvenskan) 5 10 +8	8	2	3				
Nick Bonino, C, HC Neumarkt (Serie A2) 38 8 -	13	17	21				
Orange County Register: LOADED: 12.13.2012							

NHL, union remain apart on issues, and in meetings

Anaheim Ducks

By IRA PODELL

646292

NEW YORK – The latest round of NHL labor talks ended Wednesday with the two sides in different rooms from each other.

The players' association and league negotiators met separately with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

Article Tab: image1-NHL, union remain apart on issues, and in meetings

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three nonnegotiable points. Instead, the players' association accepted the raise in funds, but then made counterproposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman then said the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators asked the union Wednesday, if that proposal was back in play, would the players take it or leave it?

"It wasn't much of a decision," said Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend Wednesday's talks. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

The offer wasn't actually resubmitted by the NHL. Neither side made any proposals Wednesday.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," players' association executive director Donald Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made."

All games through Dec. 30 have been canceled, about 43 percent of the season, along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic, and the All-Star game.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

Mediators rejoined the process Wednesday, at the request of the players' association, after they were unable to move the sides any closer to a deal during two days of talks last month.

Whether they will stay involved is uncertain.

"We did several different caucus meeting rooms, and really there's nothing new to report," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said Wednesday, the 88th day of the league's lockout. "We don't have a conclusion to the process."

After three straight days of talks between the sides ended last Thursday, Fehr began the first of his two news conferences by proclaiming he believed the sides had agreements on such issues as actual dollars, and then returned moments later to reveal the NHL rejected everything his side offered.

The 2004-05 season was lost completely before the players' association accepted a deal that included a salary cap for the first time. While no major philosophical issues such as that exist in these negotiations, the sides still don't seem be ready to come to an agreement.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in '04-05," Morrison said Wednesday. "Apparently, I was wrong."

A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January. Bettman said he wouldn't have a season shorter than that.

The NHL wants to limit personal player contracts to five years, seven for a club to re-sign its own player, and has elevated the issue to the highest level of importance. The union countered with an offer of an eight-year maximum length with the variable in salary being no greater than a 25 percent difference between the highest-paid year of the deal and the lowest

The other sticking points the NHL demanded of the players are a 10-year term on the new agreement, with a mutual opt-out option after eight years, and no compliance buy-outs or caps on escrow in the transition phase to the new structure. The union presented an offer of an eight-year deal with a reopener after six.

No owners were with Bettman and Daly on the NHL side Wednesday, but the union had plenty of players in tow: Morrison, Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Douglas Murray, and Daniel Winnik.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646293 Anaheim Ducks

NHL labor talks resume in undisclosed location

By Ira Podell,

nEW YORK -- Talks between the NHL and the union are back under way for the first time in nearly a week as the sides again search for a deal to save the hockey season.

Federal mediators are rejoining negotiations being held Wednesday in an undisclosed location under a media blackout. The union, however, has released the names of those players who are taking part in the discussions. They include Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers, Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Brendan Morrison, Douglas Murray, and Daniel Winnik.

It is believed that no owners are accompanying Commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly on the NHL side.

The talks, being held on the 88th day of the league's lockout, are the first inperson discussions between the sides since last Thursday when bargaining broke down.

All games through Dec. 30 have been canceled.

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

There are also secondary issues yet to be agreed on, including the continued participation of NHL players in the Olympics, the international calendar and drug-testing rules.

LA Daily News: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646294 Boston Bruins

NHL: No news bad news

By Steve Conroy

Thursday, December 13, 2012

There was no progress on the NHL labor front yesterday, unless you count a league proposal that supposedly had been taken off the table as progress.

The Players Association doesn't, and the high-stakes game of chicken continues while the 2012-13 season gets perilously close to dying.

"If the owners negotiate with the players, there'll be a season," one agent said last night. "If they don't, there won't be."

And as of yesterday, it appeared the owners and their representatives aren't in the mood to negotiate.

There was hope going into yesterday that talks could get back to where they were last Thursday before they fell apart, but the two sides never got into the same room during the meetings in suburban New Jersey, instead meeting with mediators separately.

Last week, when the NHL agreed to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million, it was part of a package that required the union to agree on three non-negotiable points. Instead, the PA accepted the raise in funds then made counterproposals on those points.

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NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said last week that the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators asked the players yesterday if they would take it if it was back in play.

"It wasn't much of a decision," said Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend the talks. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet so we have to keep working."

The offer wasn't actually resubmitted by the NHL. Neither side made any proposals yesterday.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," union executive director Donald Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made."

No new meetings were immediately scheduled.

The 2004-05 season was lost completely before the union accepted a deal that included a salary cap for the first time. While no major philosophical issues such as that exist in these negotiations, the sides still don't seem ready agree.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were (then)," Morrison said. "Apparently I was wrong."

The next step for the league could be to set a drop-dead date A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January. Bettman said he won't have a season shorter than that.

Bruins captain Zdeno Chara, meanwhile, is here this week while the KHL is on hiatus. He plans to return to Prague this weekend "unless something major, major happens."

With regards to the ongoing negotiations, he's chosen not to hop aboard the emotional roller coaster this time around.

"I don't have any feeling, as far as being excited or frustrated. I'm just right in between," Chara said before yesterday's meeting. "Obviously, I've been excited a number of times, and disappointed a number of times, too, so I'm just like everybody else. Right now, I'm just waiting to see."

Boston Herald LOADED: 12.13.2012

646295 Boston Bruins

Miroslav Satan rebukes Zdeno Chara

By Steve Conroy

Thursday, December 13, 2012

When locked-out NHL players sign deals to play overseas, they are out-of-sight-out-of-mind for many North Americans.

Some even have the perception that the players are off on an extended vacation. But the fact is the players are skating in real games, with real risks involved. And as they do when they step on the ice in an NHL game, the players are opening themselves up to some real costs.

The cost for Bruins captain Zdeno Chara could be a friendship.

While playing for Prague of the Kontinental Hockey League last month, Chara may have lost himself a friend in Miroslav Satan, a fellow Slovakian and former Bruins teammate. Satan is upset with the defenseman over a couple of hard hits delivered in a Nov. 4 game between Chara's Prague team and the forward's Slovan club. Neck injuries suffered by Satan have kept him out of action since.

The first hit delivered by Chara was a borderline check at the end of a play in front of the Prague net. The second and more damaging hit appeared to be clean, if brutal, with Chara blasting Satan in the neutral zone while he was skating with the puck and with his head down.

"Zdeno risked the health and life of someone who (he) calls a good friend. I'm not saying he wanted intentionally to hurt me but he knew that was me and that I didn't see him," Satan said in a translation of an interview with a European journalist.

Satan said he hoped to hash things out with Chara at some point so there are no lingering issues if they skate together again on the Slovakian national team.

Skating in Boston for the week, Chara yesterday had little to say about the hits on Satan.

"I really don't want to talk about it and go into details," Chara said. "That would only keep (the story) going. It's just unfortunate."

Boston Herald LOADED: 12.13.2012

646296 Boston Bruins

Tuukka Rask on stalemate: Enough's enough

By Steve Conroy

Wednesday, December 12, 2012

With mediated talks between NHL and NHLPA under way today in New Jersey (give credit to Newark Star-Ledger's Rich Chere for sniffing out the location), the usual suspects continued to skate this morning in anticipation of something getting done, including Bruins Shawn Thornton, Tuukka Rask and Zdeno Chara.

Whenever a new CBA is struck, there's a good chance that many players will want to erase the words "cautiously optimistic" from their vocabularies. But it still accurately describes how some of them are feeling, especially when you consider the fact that the two sides (minus the owners this time around) are back at the table so quickly after the dramatically bitter ending to talks last week. Just last Thursday, commissioner Gary Bettman dismissed the PA's request that mediation be brought back into the process, but now, for some reason, the league doesn't have a problem with it.

"I kind of felt like (the anger emanating from the owners' side) was a part of their tactics, but I'm really hopeful that we can get things done here," said Rask. "Enough's enough." Rask believes the two sides are too close to jeopardize a full season lost.

"As long as everyone cuts the (expletive) out of it, I think the numbers are really close," said Rask. "There's no real reason to cancel the season or anything like that. So I think next week or so we're going to have a deal, hopefully."

Rask believes — or hopes, at least — that the league has come to realize the strength of the union.

"I think they're trying to see if we're going to break or not. I think they've been looking at that the whole time," said Rask. "But as we've said all along, we're a really strong union and we stick by what we want. It's been a tough negotiation, but I think the owners have to realize we're not going to break, so let's make a deal that's good for both sides."

Chara, meanwhile, is home this week while the KHL is on hiatus. His plan is to return to Prague over the weekend and is somewhat resigned to the fact that a deal won't be close enough by then to avoid a return trip, especially with games through Dec. 30 having been canceled.

He's chosen not to hop aboard the emotional roller coaster this time around.

"Honestly, I don't have any feeling, as far as being excited or frustrated. I'm just right in between," said Chara. "Obviously, I've been excited a number of times — and disappointed a number of times, too — so I'm just like everybody else. Right now, I'm just waiting to see."

Boston Herald LOADED: 12.13.2012

646297 Buffalo Sabres

NHL, players' association again fail to make progress with mediators

Once again, nothing is happening.

The NHL and its players' association met with Federal mediators today in New Jersey in an attempt to end the lockout and start the season. And, as you might have guessed ...

"There's nothing new to report," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly told reporters. "We don't have a conclusion to the process."

"I can't tell you that any progress was made," NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr said. "All I'm going to say is that there wasn't any change in position."

There are no further meetings scheduled.

---John Vogl

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646298 Buffalo Sabres

Hecht returns to Germany, joins Pominville on Adler Mannheim

Jochen Hecht, who had been skating in Buffalo while waiting for the NHL to start, has returned to his homeland and hometown team. Hecht has rejoined Adler Mannheim, which recently signed former Sabres teammate Jason Pominville.

Hecht, an unrestricted free agent, has an out clause in his Mannheim contract that would allow him to play in the NHL if the lockout ends. The forward played for Mannheim from 1994 to 1998 and helped the team win two German titles.

The Sabres opted not to re-sign the oft-concussed Hecht, but they have a glaring whole at center should play resume. Hecht has repeatedly said he's healthy.

---John Vogl

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646299 Carolina Hurricanes

DeCock: Dwindling group of players skates on

By Luke DeCock -

RALEIGH -- They'll keep skating until all hope is lost, one stride at a time. The group has dwindled as optimism has faded, but there were still eight NHL players on the ice at Raleigh Center Ice on Wednesday.

"We have to be ready," Carolina Hurricanes goalie Cam Ward said, with a resigned shrug. Ready. Just in case. If.

As negotiators for the NHL and NHL Players Association met with federal mediators in a secret location, attendance at the very public workouts conducted by the Hurricanes and other local players continues to decrease.

Eric Staal is gone, although his brother Jordan is still around. Jay Harrison, a frequent participant, wasn't on the ice Wednesday. Jussi Jokinen skated at RCI but plans to head back to Finland this week.

That left eight players on the ice: Ward, Jokinen, Jordan Staal, Joe Corvo, Joni Pitkanen and Anthony Stewart from the Hurricanes; Peter Harrold of the New Jersey Devils and Kevin Westgarth of the Los Angeles Kings.

Even the crowd in the stands is down to the bare minimum. Fans once flocked to these workouts, in September when there was still a chance of starting the season on time and in October in attempt to fill the yawning hockey void. Wednesday, there were only four hard-core regulars watching the skeleton crew work out.

In many ways, the scene at Raleigh Center Ice is a microcosm of the NHL at large: slowly disintegrating, but held together by a lingering core of stubborn optimism in the face of overwhelming negativity.

No one knows the state of the game – and why it remains on enforced hiatus – better than Westgarth, a key member of the NHLPA's negotiating committee. He has been actively involved in some of the most sensitive discussions, and was widely credited for working with Calgary Flames owner Murray Edwards to forge a breakthrough on pension contributions in last week's meetings.

That's one of the remaining points of discussion, along with the length of the new labor agreement, contract lengths and the overall split of revenue between owners and players.

"We're a lot closer than we were a week ago on all those issues," Westgarth said. "There's no arguing that. It's getting very close. That being said, it seems like both sides are digging in their heels a little bit."

Westgarth, who is married to Bill Cowher's daughter Meagan and lives in Raleigh during the offseason, didn't attend Wednesday's secret meetings because he's been traveling too much – for negotiations and charity hockey games – and needed to get back home and back on the ice.

So he was there, part of a dwindling crowd still clinging to hope owners and players will be able to put rhetoric aside and get back on the ice, as time inexorably runs out.

"I just shake my head," Westgarth said. "It's incredibly unfortunate to see where we are."

Jokinen has had two stints playing in Finland already but came back to Raleigh both times, in hopes a deal would soon be done. He's heading back now, for how long no one knows.

"Merry Christmas!" Jokinen called as he exited the front door of Raleigh Center Ice. If he's right – if he's still in his homeland for the holidays – it will be a long winter for the NHL indeed.

News Observer LOADED: 12.13.2012

646300 Carolina Hurricanes

Still no end in sight for NHL impasse

By Chip Alexander -

The NHL apparently remains in a take-it-or-leave-it mode when it comes to a new collective bargaining agreement.

The NHL and NHL Players Association resumed CBA talks Wednesday in New Jersey through the services of federal mediator Scot Beckenbaugh. Neither side was in the same room at the same time, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said, during the 61/2 hours.

"There's nothing new to report," Daly said. "We do not have a conclusion to the process."

When CBA negotiations broke down last Thursday after some marathon sessions in New York, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said the league's proposal was no longer on the table.

That included an offer to use \$300million from the league's share of hockey-related revenue (HRR) to help "make whole" existing player contracts in deferred compensation that Bettman labeled "transition payments."

The league remains insistent on the players accepting a 10-year CBA with an opt-out after eight years, and contract lengths of five years for new signings and seven years for the re-signing of a player.

The union has proposed an eight-year CBA with opt-out after the sixth year, and a maximum of eight years for new contracts.

Los Angeles Kings forward Kevin Westgarth, a member of the players' negotiating committee, did not attend Wednesday's meeting. He noted the \$300 million make whole provision was contingent on the players "signing on the dotted line" and signing off on the NHL's CBA package.

"They've been saying that about everything." said Westgarth, who lives in Raleigh during the offseason. "Every step (the NHL) makes for whatever reason is tied to the whole thing being accepted. We keep moving and they want to keep disregarding our moves."

NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr, special counsel Steve Fehr and 13 players were at Wednesday's meeting in Iselin, N.J. Bettman and Daly represented the league but there were no NHL owners present.

Daly said the union would get back to Beckenbaugh later Wednesday night and that Beckenbaugh then would talk to the league.

The NHL and NHLPA agreed to mediation two weeks ago, but two days of meetings then were not productive.

Daly said he was not sure when more meetings will be held.

Forward Brendan Morrison, who was at Wednesday's meeting, told reporters the league's non-negotiable stance on its proposal didn't leave the players with much of a decision.

Asked to sum up his feelings about the day, Morrison said, "I think discouraged is a good word."

News Observer LOADED: 12.13.2012

646301 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL returns last offer as talks with NHLPA resume

Sports Xchange

Talks between the NHL and its players union ended Wednesday night with the league putting its last offer -- which had been yanked last week -- back on the table.

This time it seems to be a take-it-or-leave-it offer, according to multiple reports.

The Wednesday meetings also marked the return of mediators from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services, who had been involved in the talks two weeks ago. No further meetings between the sides were scheduled as the mediators were working with them separately.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly told ESPN.com there was no "conclusion" to the process as the league was waiting to hear from the players Wednesday night

NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr told reporters that there has been little progress since Thursday.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made."

Free agent forward Brendan Morrison said this standoff has been worse than 2004-05, the last time a season was called off.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 04-05. Apparently, I was wrong," Morrison told Fireandlce.com. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

The talks marked the first time the sides had discussed a new collective bargaining agreement since negotiations broke down on Thursday.

On Monday, the NHL cancelled games through Dec. 30, making 527 regular-season games have been cancelled so far. Also, the league already has called off the Winter Classic in Ann Arbor, Mich., and the All-Star Game in Columbus, Ohio.

Fehr thought that an agreement was reached over money but owners rejected the proposal and denied that the deal was close to being agreed on

Commissioner Gary Bettman said the NHL put an additional \$100 million -- for total of \$300 million -- for "make-whole" contracts on the table along with other concessions and the players were unwilling to give.

The commissioner said the league had made concessions on five-year player contracts, a longer collective bargaining agreement and the "make whole" to help teams with long player contracts transition to the new collective bargaining agreement.

When the union returned with a counter proposal rather than a decision on the league's offer, the NHL rejected the NHLPA proposal and Bettman pulled many of its concessions the league made.

Fehr said the league balked at the union's proposal for an eight-year collective bargaining agreement with an opt-out after six years. The owners wanted a 10-year contract, with the ability to opt out after eight seasons.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 12.13.2012

646302 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks' Hossa gets medical OK to play

By Chris Kuc,

Chicago Blackhawks winger Marian Hossa has been medically cleared by the team to play after his recovery from a concussion, according to a source.

The veteran was injured during Game 3 of the Western Conference quarterfinals against the Phoenix Coyotes in April, when he was illegally checked by Raffi Torres.

Hossa had been working out with Hawks team personnel in Chicago during the NHL lockout, but has been spending time in Florida since being cleared.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 12.13.2012

646303 Chicago Blackhawks

Low-key Kane living with mom in Switzerland

Staff

The Wall Street Journal reports: Blackhawks star and renowned party animal Patrick Kane is keeping a low profile off the ice in Switzerland, where he lives with his mother while playing for the Biel team during the NHL lockout.

"We're not here on a vacation," Donna Kane said. "We're here for him to play hockey."

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 12.13.2012

646304 Chicago Blackhawks

Kane hopes to avoid return trip to Switzerland

By Chris Kuc,

Patrick Kane has a plane ticket for Switzerland he'd rather not use.

The Blackhawks forward is back in Chicago while his European team takes a break, and Kane hopes the NHL lockout is settled in time to prevent a return trip.

"It would be nice not to have to go back Sunday and just ... stay here and get ready for a training camp," Kane said Wednesday after an informal practice at Johnny's IceHouse West. "Right now, I'm scheduled to go back. It's something you don't want to do; you want (the lockout) to be over and done with. It's an experience I'll never forget, but life is much better here in the States and in Chicago."

Kane has seven goals and eight assists in 14 games with HC Biel in the Swiss National League A, taking advantage of the larger ice surface to showcase his offensive talent and get in shape for a possible NHL season.

"I played 14 games," Kane said. "That's been enough for me to get ready for a season over here. Especially with a week training camp, I'll feel even more ready. I'm happy I did it, but now it's time to play in the NHL and get going over here."

The roller-coaster negotiations between the NHL and the players association — which resumed Wednesday — have had Kane poised to return at a moment's notice.

"I was getting texts from teammates last week ... telling me that I was going to be coming home and 'pack your bags,' " Kane said. "I'm not really going to speculate anymore until somebody tells me directly that it's done."

Until then, Kane plans to play in Europe, including joining HC Davos for the Spengler Cup tournament that runs from Christmas Day to New Year's Day in Switzerland. While he has enjoyed playing overseas, the 24-year-old prefers the comforts of the NHL.

"You don't realize how good you have it over here in Chicago with the training staff and equipment managers," Kane said. "You're taken care of so well that you take it for granted.

"It's definitely a little bit different over there with things like packing up your own bag and putting it on the bus and then taking a three-hour bus ride to a game and having to play as soon as you get off the bus. (But) it's been a good experience."

Hossa cleared: The Hawks have cleared winger Marian Hossa to play after his recovery from a concussion, a source said. Hossa was injured during a playoff game in April when the Coyotes' Raffi Torres illegally checked him.

Hossa had been working out with Hawks personnel in Chicago during the lockout but has been spending time in Florida and practicing with players there, including former Hawks teammate Brian Campbell.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 12.13.2012

646305 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL owners pushing fans to brink of apathy

By Barry Rozner

Just last week, NHL comedian Gary Bettman was complaining about how the number of long-term contracts has risen dramatically the last few years.

Bettman reminded us that in 2004 there was only one NHL contract longer than six years, but now there are nearly 90.

So since the advent of Bettman's sublime CBA that cost the NHL a season in 2004-05, he's what exactly, upset that some owners and GMs signed players to long-term deals within the rules?

"The trend has gone completely in the wrong way," Bettman said, "and that has a whole host of consequences to the game and to the operation of our clubs."

If you're not rolling on the floor, laughing your hat off, maybe you just don't appreciate Bettman for what he is.

The two sides made some progress last week, and the last big hurdle to ending this lockout is player contract length, with the NHL's Bill Daly insisting term limits are "the hill we would die on."

The term limits he should really be worried about are his and Bettman's, because if NHL fans don't come back in full, Bettman may be out on his \$8-million-a-year back.

In the meantime, Bettman and his flock of hawks are again forcing the players to fix a system the owners created.

In baseball, the Dodgers spend whatever they want and MLB taxes them and shares the revenue. That's one approach. In hockey, the owners lock out the players. That's a slightly different approach.

Just so we're straight, the owners need the players to prevent other owners from signing players for too many years or too much money. More specifically, small-market owners want the players to prevent the big-market owners — and their creative GMs — from finding ways around the cap.

But smart GMs will always find ways. They will invent new ones if they can't use the old ones. You can be certain Detroit GM Ken Holland has already figured out where this will end and has a plan in place to eventually circumvent the cap.

Yup, another work stoppage because owners can't agree among themselves.

As you undoubtedly recall, Marian Hossa signed for 12 years and \$63 million. Brian Campbell got eight years and \$57 million. Rick DiPietro 15 years and \$67 million. Ilya Kovalchuk 15 years and \$100 million. The list goes on and on.

The Penguins just signed Sidney Crosby in June for 12 years and \$104 million. Sure, he's the best player in the game when healthy, but would you take that kind of risk with a guy who's one ding away from being daffy forever?

See, that's the point. Pittsburgh thinks it's worth the risk. Your dime, your danger.

On the other hand, Minnesota signed Zach Parise and Ryan Suter for 13 years and \$98 million each — selling thousands of tickets in the process — but Wild owner Craig Leipold is one of Bettman's biggest supporters in the fight to lower salaries and length of contracts.

Uber-hawk Jeremy Jacobs signed \$70 million worth of contracts in the days leading up to the lockout.

Together, owners spent \$300 million on extensions in the final week before the CBA expired, owners like Jacobs and Leipold knowing they had no intention of honoring those agreements.

But Bettman stands in front of the cameras and with a straight face talks about "trust."

Despite it all, the two sides were closing in last week when the owners told the players they couldn't have their representation come in and finish the deal.

Yes, a bunch of experienced businessmen who have dealt with these issues their whole lives, told a group of athletes — many uneducated — to sign on the spot, and if they brought in their attorney, Don Fehr, it was a deal-breaker.

Who negotiates like this, Crazy Joe Davola?

It's been a circus from the start, with Bettman in the center ring surrounded by scary clowns, dancing bears and bike-riding monkeys. However, even with last week's posturing and dire predictions, I believe they will settle this and play a season, maybe 45 or 50 games.

The owners who never wanted it — but allowed Bettman to shutter the game again — will have to ask themselves if it was worth it.

They assume the fans will return, because hockey fans can't live without their NHL, and they have always come back before.

But this time, what if they don't?

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 12.13.2012

646306 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL, NHLPA meet separately with mediators Wednesday

TRACEY MYERS

The NHL and NHLPA met in what began as an undisclosed location on Wednesday, and they probably hoped it would stay that way. That didn't happen. Onlookers (fans, media, etc.) looked and Wednesday's meeting and hoped some progress would be made.

Doesn't seem like that happened, either.

The two sides met – or as reported, met separately with federal mediators -- in New Jersey on Wednesday. But reports out of the talks state that not much progress was made toward a new collective bargaining agreement – and an end to a lockout that has now reached Day 88.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly told reporters that, "there is no conclusion to this round of the process right now."

Mediators reportedly told players that the league's last offer was available if the union would accept it. But Brendan Morrison, who last played for the Chicago Blackhawks, told reporters the players still aren't accepting that deal

"I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet. So we have to keep working," Morrison said. "It's good in a sense we're here, and bad in a sense there is no progress."

It was the second time the two sides used mediators in negotiations. Two weeks ago mediators met with the league and PA for two days before deciding the sides were too far apart. Today, they talked with each side separately. Basically, it proved futile both times.

NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr told reporters, "there were discussions of the various issues involved and now far apart we are and where we go from here. I can't tell you that any progress was made."

There are no new talks planned at the moment.

Blackhawks defenseman (and player representative) Steve Montador and forward Jamal Mayers were also at Wednesday's meeting.

"It's extremely frustrating where we are," said Mayers, who talked of how close on Monday. The league maintains that's not the case. "The league's 'package deal,' or take-it-or-leave-it offer, makes completing a deal difficult, considering all our movement in last Thursday's proposal."

Games are currently canceled through Dec. 30. Still, some optimism remains that the two sides will work things out and salvage a partial season. Blackhawks forward Patrick Kane, who has played overseas with EHC Biel (Switzerland), is currently back in Chicago. He's scheduled to go back to Switzerland on Sunday if the lockout remains unresolved; but he hopes things are, and that he stays to prepare for training camp instead.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.13.2012

646307 Chicago Blackhawks

Kane back from Switzerland, hopes to stay in Chicago

TRACEY MYERS

Patrick Kane enjoyed his time over in Switzerland, enjoyed playing some actual hockey games these past few months. And while he's set to go back on Sunday if need be, Kane's hoping he doesn't have to.

Kane is back in Chicago while Swiss teams take a break, and joined past and present Blackhawks at their informal skate on Wednesday. And with optimism building that the lockout will soon be over, Kane hopes he'll be lacing them up for Blackhawks training camp instead of heading back overseas.

"It's tough to tell, to be honest with you with the whole thing. I was getting texts last week telling me 'Pack your bags.' So I'm not going to speculate anymore until someone tells me it's done," Kane said after practice. "But it would be nice not to have to go back Sunday, stay here and get ready for a training camp."

[More: NHL, NHLPA to resume talks Wednesday]

Yes, we've all been down the close-but-not-close road with the NHL-NHLPA talks. But there really does seem to be growing optimism as the two sides meet with mediators in an undisclosed location – which is now reportedly New Jersey.

But during the nonstop lack of negotiation progress – and there were months of that -- Kane was staying sharp. It was an experience, and a good on-ice one.

"It was different, from the way you play in the 'D' zone to the bigger ice surface to playing with different players, too," he said. "It was definitely different. But it was still hockey, I was still playing, and it really helped me get into shape and get my game where I want it to be."

Outside of hockey, life in Biel, Switzerland, was pretty quiet. He and fellow NHLers were recognized there – mainly because the cars they drove had the team logo on it – but it was otherwise a quiet time.

"It wasn't bad. It was really peaceful," Kane said. "The toughest part was the language barrier. First language is German, then French, and they speak some English. It was tough to communicate over there. But everyone on the team speaks English, and it was nice having my mom there for a while to make me a meal and just help me with certain things."

[More: Mayers says NHL, NHLPA are close, remain optimistic]

If Kane does go back, he won't be going with his mom again. He said he'll bring his girlfriend. He also said, if the lockout continues, he'll also play for HC Davos in Spengler Cup, Dec. 26-31 in Switzerland.

But Kane hopes the lockout is resolved soon, that he's staying put in Chicago for a while, and that he'll be prepping for training camp instead of another overseas flight.

"It's something you don't really want to do. You want it to be over and done with," Kane said. "It's an experience I'll never forget but life is much better here. You don't realize how good you have it here with training staff, equipment managers; you're taken care of so well. But I'm glad I did it."

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[More: NHL, NHLPA to resume talks Wednesday]

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[More: Mayers says NHL, NHLPA are close, remain optimistic]

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Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.13.2012

646309 Columbus Blue Jackets

NHL lockout: Mediators run into brick wall in talks

On second thought, players still don't like latest offer

By Aaron Portzline

The Columbus Dispatch Thursday December 13, 2012 5:01 AM

The NHL's latest collective bargaining proposal to players — the same offer that was pulled off the table in disgust late last week — was back before the union yesterday when the sides met in New Jersey.

Federal mediators, who found no hope for a resolution two weeks ago, presented the NHL's take-it-or-leave-it proposal as a "what if?" NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said. The union, represented by 11 players including Blue Jackets defenseman Adrian Aucoin, again decided to leave it.

"Nothing is on the table from either side," Daly said via email.

NHL Players' Association executive director Don Fehr told the New York Daily News: "All I am going to say is there wasn't any change in positions."

And so the meeting failed, like so many other attempts. There's only a remote chance that more talks with mediators will take place today.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 2004-05," veteran NHL center Brendan Morrison told The Record newspaper in Hackensack, N.J. "Apparently I was wrong. I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet. So we have to keep working."

Although the distrust and anger between the NHL and union would suggest otherwise, an agreement does not appear out of reach. The biggest hurdle — how to split hockey-related revenues — appears to have been cleared, pushing other issues to the forefront.

The NHL wants a 10-year agreement; the players favor eight years. The league wants a contract term limit of five years (seven if the club drafted the player); the players are pushing for six years.

Also, the NHL demands that no contract vary more than 5 percent from year to year, their way of eliminating the front-loaded or back-diving contracts that allow clubs to circumvent the spirit of the salary cap. The players are against these limits entirely.

There are other ancillary issues — Do the players take part in the Winter Olympics? Will the conferences realign for 2013-14? — that will need to be hashed out, too.Once those agreements are in place, the sides will have to agree on a transition plan, giving clubs a vehicle to fit their existing contracts/salary structure into the new agreement. For instance, a club whose payroll exceeds the new salary cap could be given a one-time exception.

The fact that the NHL and the players association are even considering transition plans is seen by some as proof that an agreement is not far on the horizon.

The NHL has canceled all games through Dec. 30. If history is a guide, the league has roughly one month to get a deal in place if any semblance of a season is to be salvaged.

Commissioner Gary Bettman has said that 48 games are the fewest the league could play and maintain a "season of integrity." In 1994-95, Bettman's first lockout, the sides settled on Jan. 11, opened the season on Jan. 20 and played 48 games, ending the season in early May.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 12.13.2012

646310 Dallas Stars

NHL players, owners in separate rooms as talks end Wednesday

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The latest round of NHL labor talks ended with the two sides not even getting into the same room with each other.

The players' association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't immediately appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three nonnegotiable points. Instead, the players' association accepted the raise in funds, but then made counterproposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators informed the union on Wednesday that the proposal was still available, but it carried a take-it-or-leave it ultimatum.

"It wasn't much of a decision," said Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend Wednesday's talks. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

All games through Dec. 30 have been canceled, about 43 percent of the season, along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic, and the All-Star game.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

Mediators rejoined the process Wednesday, at the request of the players' association, after they were unable to move the sides any closer to a deal during two days of talks last month.

Whether they will stay involved beyond Wednesday remains to be seen.

"We did several different caucus meeting rooms, and really there's nothing new to report," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said Wednesday, the 88th day of the league's lockout. "We don't have a conclusion to the process."

The union was expected to get back in touch with federal mediator Scot L. Beckenbaugh on Wednesday night, and he was then supposed to reach out to the NHI

After three straight days of talks between the sides ended last Thursday, union executive director Donald Fehr began the first of his two news conferences by proclaiming he believed the sides had agreements on such issues as actual dollars, and then returned moments later to reveal the NHL rejected everything his side offered.

The 2004-05 season was lost completely before the players' association accepted a deal that included a salary cap for the first time. While no major philosophical issues such as that exist in these negotiations, the sides still don't appear to be ready to come to an agreement.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 04-05," Morrison said Wednesday. "Apparently, I was wrong."

A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January. Bettman said he wouldn't have a season shorter than that.

The NHL wants to limit personal player contracts to five years, seven for a club to re-sign its own player, and has elevated the issue to the highest level of importance. The union countered with an offer of an eight-year maximum length with the variable in salary being no greater than a 25 percent difference between the highest-paid year of the deal and the lowest

The other sticking points the NHL demanded of the players are a 10-year term on the new agreement, with a mutual opt-out option after eight years, and no compliance buy-outs or caps on escrow in the transition phase to the new structure. The union presented an offer of an eight-year deal with a reopener after six.

No owners were with Bettman and Daly on the NHL side Wednesday, but the union had plenty of players in tow: Morrison, Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Douglas Murray, and Daniel Winnik.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646311 Dallas Stars

Stars Jamie Benn, Stephane Robidas heading home from Europe

MIKE HEIKA

The Hamburg Freezers released on their website today that Jamie Benn will be leaving the team immediately. He has asked for a personal break and does not appear to have an injury issues. The guess is he would simply like to be home for Christmas.

GM Stephane Richer said Benn would return to the Freezers if the lockout continues or the season is cancelled. Benn has 20 points (7G, 13A) in 19 games with Hamburg. He was also plus-8 and had 30 PIM.

Stephane Robidas also has returned from Europe. He was playing for HIFK Helsinki.

Here is the google translate of the team's press release on Benn:

JAMIE BENN RETURNS TO NORTH AMERICA BACK TIME BEING12.12.2012 – Freezers striker Jamie Benn is for now no longer go for the Hamburg Freezers hunting for goals already this Thursday and return to North America. The 23-year-old Canadian was due to the NHL lockout on 2 October in Germany and has changed for the DEL DEL club has 19 games of 20 points scored (7 Tore/13 templates).

"Jamie has asked for a break to settle personal matters in North America," said sports director Stéphane Richer. "This request we have complied. Of course, he is one of our key players, but personal reasons enjoy priority for us. Jamie was in the jersey of the Hamburg Freezers shown outstanding performance and particularly in his first games took pressure from the other players. Should the lockout continue or fail the season complete, we expect Jamie back in January in Hamburg. For now, we give him now first time that he needs."

"I am the Hamburg Freezers very grateful for their support," said Jamie Benn. "In fact, I was here super absorbed in the past two months. Above all the fans have left a lasting impression on me. I hope they respect this step. For the next few games I wish my team, of course, a lot of success and continue to many victories. "

"Of course, a team without Jamie Benn not the same," remarked coach Benoit Laporte. "However, we have repeatedly demonstrated how strong and supple is the team. I am convinced that we will go with the same dedication and the same enthusiasm in the coming games. The boys now have a very different self-confidence as a beginning of the season and will take on responsibility."

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646312 Dallas Stars

Ex-Stars wing James Neal on roster of union's Toronto charity game

Associated Press

TORONTO — Tampa Bay Lighting forward Steven Stamkos and P.K. Subban of the Montreal Canadiens will lead teams of locked-out NHL players during a charity game next week at the former Maple Leaf Gardens.

The game will be held next Wednesday at Ryerson University's new Mattamy Athletic Centre, located inside the building the Toronto Maple Leafs called home from 1931-99. The proceeds will benefit the NHL Players' Association's Goals & Dreams fund and RBC's Play Hockey initiative.

"A great opportunity to share the joy and excitement of hockey with our fans," Stamkos said in a statement released Wednesday. "I'm looking forward to playing alongside this impressive lineup of fellow NHL players while helping to raise funds to benefit local hockey programs across the country."

James Neal, Logan Couture, Dion Phaneuf, Phil Kessel, Tomas Kaberle, Mike Komisarek, Kris Versteeg, Niklas Kronwall and John-Michael Liles are also expected to attend.

Complete rosters for Team Stamkos and Team Subban rosters will be announced.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646313 Dallas Stars

Stardate: Dec. 12, 2008 - Turco rejects rolling Red Wings to help reeling Stars

SportsDayDFW.com

A series of Stars games and moments that happened on a specific date. The following appeared in the Dec. 13, 2008 editions of The Dallas Morning News.

Marty Turco has had a season to forget, so why not mix in a night to remember.

The Dallas Stars netminder came up with 37 saves Friday to lead a ragtag team of mixed parts to a 3-1 victory against the defending Stanley Cup champion Detroit Red Wings.

Turco, who recorded only his third career victory against the Wings in his 19th regular season appearance against them, was at his aggressive and lucky best. Either way, the Stars will take it.

"It was a simple game plan, we defended well," said Stars center Mike Modano, who was among the leaders in defensive play. "It's a good tape to hold onto and look back at what we did collectively."

In fact, it's the perfect game plan the Stars need if they hope to get back in the playoff race.

Missing six key regulars because of injuries, the Stars moved their record to 11-13-4, good for 26 points, which still has them last in the Western Conference.

"We competed hard, had excellent goaltending and we played well as a group," Stars coach Dave Tippett said. "It builds a belief system that it doesn't matter who we are playing, we can find a way to win."

The Red Wings are the second-highest scoring team in the NHL with 100 goals and touted a lineup that could include four All-Star Game starters in Nicklas Lidstrom, Henrik Zetterberg, Pavel Datsyuk and Marian Hossa.

The Stars answered with goals from two rookies - one of which was playing hockey in Sweden last week.

Tom Wandell, 21, scored his first NHL goal in his second NHL game to tie the score in the second period, and Fabian Brunnstrom, 23, tallied his eighth goal of the season 100 seconds later to give the Stars a lead they would not surrender.

Wandell was in the lineup only because of injuries to forwards Brenden Morrow, Jere Lehtinen, Steve Ott and Joel Lundqvist, as well as the six-game suspension of Sean Avery.

Mix in injuries to defensemen Sergei Zubov and Stephane Robidas, and the Stars answered with Doug Janik and Andrew Hutchinson, who were recently in the minors.

But that was enough. Well, that ... and Turco.

The Stars goalie holds the key to the Stars' ability to save the season.

Finding consistency for him, and the team, will be the key going forward with an injury depleted squad.

"I haven't heard anybody feel sorry for ourselves or anybody with their head down thinking tonight was impossible with a depleted roster," Turco said. "We've got a tight, talented bunch of gutty guys in here that can get the job done."

-Mike Heika / DMN

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646314 Dallas Stars

NHL, union remain apart on issues and in meetings

By IRA PODELL

NEW YORK — The latest round of NHL labor talks ended with the two sides in different rooms from each other.

The players' association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three nonnegotiable points. Instead, the players' association accepted the raise in funds, but then made counterproposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators asked the union on Wednesday, if that proposal was back in play, would the players take it or leave it?

"It wasn't much of a decision," said Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend Wednesday's talks. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

The offer wasn't actually resubmitted by the NHL. Neither side made any proposals Wednesday.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," players' association executive director Donald Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made."

All games through Dec. 30 have been canceled, about 43 percent of the season, along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic, and the All-Star game.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

Mediators rejoined the process Wednesday, at the request of the players' association, after they were unable to move the sides any closer to a deal during two days of talks last month.

Whether they will stay involved is uncertain.

"We did several different caucus meeting rooms, and really there's nothing new to report," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said Wednesday, the 88th day of the league's lockout. "We don't have a conclusion to the process."

After three straight days of talks between the sides ended last Thursday, Fehr began the first of his two news conferences by proclaiming he believed the sides had agreements on such issues as actual dollars, and then returned moments later to reveal the NHL rejected everything his side offered.

The 2004-05 season was lost completely before the players' association accepted a deal that included a salary cap for the first time. While no major philosophical issues such as that exist in these negotiations, the sides still don't seem be ready to come to an agreement.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 04-05," Morrison said Wednesday. "Apparently, I was wrong."

A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January. Bettman said he wouldn't have a season shorter than that.

The NHL wants to limit personal player contracts to five years, seven for a club to re-sign its own player, and has elevated the issue to the highest level of importance. The union countered with an offer of an eight-year maximum length with the variable in salary being no greater than a 25 percent difference between the highest-paid year of the deal and the lowest.

The other sticking points the NHL demanded of the players are a 10-year term on the new agreement, with a mutual opt-out option after eight years, and no compliance buy-outs or caps on escrow in the transition phase to the new structure. The union presented an offer of an eight-year deal with a reopener after six.

No owners were with Bettman and Daly on the NHL side Wednesday, but the union had plenty of players in tow: Morrison, Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Douglas Murray, and Daniel Winnik.

Star-Telegram LOADED: 12.13.2012

646315 Detroit Red Wings

NHL: Sides still far apart; players could decide to decertify association

By Helene St. James

Attempts to start the NHL season are proving increasingly arduous and tenuous, and players might decide that decertifying their association is the next best step.

Wednesday's meeting in New Jersey never reached a point where the NHL and the NHL Players' Association met face-to-face. The sides talked separately with federal mediators, who had no binding say in a collective bargaining agreement.

• MORE: Wings' Kronwall says: 'We're in this for the next generation'

The words "critical time" have been mentioned since last month, but it's mid-December, and if a 48-game season -- the minimum required by the NHL -- is to happen, discord can't linger much past next week.

"Time is running out, clock is ticking, no doubt," Red Wings defenseman and player representative Niklas Kronwall said Wednesday after skating in Troy.

The sides have been at odds since owners locked out players Sept. 16. Some of the more contentious issues are player contracting rights, transition payments, escrow and pensions.

Players might have to decide over the next few days whether they want to accept the proposal the NHL made last week or disband.

The latter would require that 30% of NHLPA membership sign a petition to decertify. After filing a motion with the National Labor Relations Board, at least 50.1% of membership would have to vote in favor. Once that happens, players could sue owners for triple damages on the grounds the lockout would be illegal.

The process takes months, meaning the entire season would be lost to a labor dispute. The last time the NHL and NHLPA fought over a new CBA, it cost the whole 2004-05 season.

Decertification is not ideal. Players will have to weigh the long-term risks versus the immediate rewards of returning to work under what would be a restrictive CBA compared to the one that just expired -- or hope the NHL will view decertification as enough of a threat to make concessions.

"We're in this for the better of the game, and for the next generation as well," Kronwall said. "Of course, anyone can just look in the mirror and say, 'What would be best for you,' but you also owe yourself and the next generation the best possible."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.13.2012

646316 Detroit Red Wings

If new home built for Red Wings, will the beloved Joe have to go?

By JC Reindl

Prospects for a new \$650-million downtown Detroit sports arena and entertainment district that would provide new home ice for the Detroit Red Wings prompts questions about the future of Joe Louis Arena, the NHL hockey team's home for the last 33 years.

The ambitious development plans unveiled Tuesday by team owner Mike Ilitch's organization contained no mention of the aging Joe Louis, which seats a little more than 20,000 and has seen the Red Wings win four of the team's 11 Stanley Cups.

An Illitch spokeswoman referred questions to the city, which owns the arena and leases it to Ilitch's Olympia Entertainment.

Detroit City Council President Charles Pugh said a move by the Red Wings would create possibilities for the Joe Louis site, which could be cleared to make way for something new, he said.

Mayor David Bing's spokesman, Anthony Neely, said there are no specific plans, but "I'm sure someone out there has been thinking long-range."

Joe Louis Arena first saw hockey action in December 1979. The boxy and windowless riverfront arena also plays host to various concerts, events and off-ice sporting competitions each year. Future President Ronald Reagan spoke there during the 1980 Republican National Convention.

The arena's neighbor to the east -- Cobo Center -- is undergoing a nearly \$300-million renovation.

Robin Boyle, professor and chairman of the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at Wayne State University, said the arena site could be key to the riverfront's ongoing redevelopment.

"It strikes me that with the redevelopment of Cobo, the removal of the Ford Auditorium, and now the potential for clearing the Joe Louis Arena, we've got a very rich opportunity," Boyle said.

If history is a guide, "the Joe" could meet the same fate as the Wings' previous home, Olympia Stadium, fondly known as the Old Red Barn and remembered for its numerous boxing matches, concerts and circuses. That venue opened at Grand River Avenue and McGraw in 1927 and met the wrecking ball in 1986. The site is now home to a National Guard facility.

Then-Mayor Coleman Young got Joe Louis Arena built in the late 1970s to keep the Red Wings from moving to Oakland County. Details of the current lease agreement between the city and the arena's management were not available Tuesday afternoon.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.13.2012

646317 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Niklas Kronwall says: 'We're in this for the next generation,' as NHL, PA meet $\,$

By Helene St. James

Here we go again: The NHL and the NHL Players Association are meeting again today, this time in New Jersey, in an attempt to reach a collective bargaining agreement.

The words "critical time" have been mentioned since last month, but now it's mid-December, and if even a shortened 2012-13 season is to be feasible, an agreement must be reached by next week.

"Time is running out, clock is ticking, no doubt," Wings defenseman and player representative Niklas Kronwall said after skating today in Troy.

The PA group, led by executive Don Fehr, includes 13 players, none of them Wings and none bearing the high profile Sidney Crosby carried into last week's meetings. That session stretched three days and included owners but led to no accord.

This time, the NHL is represented by commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy Bill Daly, with no owners included.

There are numerous key issues to address:

- Player contracting rights: The NHL wants five-to-seven-year limits with 5% salary variance, while the NHLPA has proposed eight-year limits and 25% variance.
- Escrow: The players badly want a cap on it.
- The salary cap ceiling: The NHL would like to come in around \$60 million.
- Pensions: Made more difficult by different laws in the United States and Canada.

The contracting rights are among the most divisive issues. The NHL is determined to make it impossible for general managers to offer the kind of multiyear, back-diving contracts that have been used to keep down the salary cap number. (With the Wings, for example, Henrik Zetterberg's cap number is \$6 million because he signed a 12-year deal. Had he been limited to a seven-year deal, his cap number would be more like \$8.5 million -- which would then squeeze down the salary of a teammate.)

The PA is determined to look out for its future class of mid-tier players.

"We're in this for the better of the game and for the next generation, as well," Kronwall said. "Of course, anyone can just look in the mirror and say, "What would be best for you?' But you also owe yourself and the next generation the best possible. So that's something we're very concerned with."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.13.2012

646318 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings see advantage to actually playing games

By Ted Kulfan

Troy — About half the Red Wings have been skating locally three times a week since the lockout began Sept. 15, trying to maintain close-to-NHL shape.

The other half have been playing primarily in Europe during that same time span.

For those players it's as if the lockout — which reached Day 88 Wednesday — never occurred. in a sense.

Those players — 186 have played at least briefly overseas out of 690 NHL players — have kept playing. They've been in a regular practice and playing routine since September, just as they would in an NHL season.

But for Daniel Cleary, and about nine other Wings who've skated at Troy Sports Center, it's been about trying to stay in NHL shape as well as they can.

"Anybody who is playing is going to be at an advantage, for sure," said Cleary after completing another morning of workouts. "You can't duplicate the game speed. It'll take some time for guys who haven't played to get up to speed."

There are seven Red Wings currently playing in Europe (Valtteri Filppula is out because of a sprained knee). Along with those players, defenseman Kyle Quincey is playing for Denver in the Central Hockey League, while forward Gustav Nyquist and defenseman Brendan Smith, two players with minor league options available, are playing for the Red Wings' minor league affiliate Grand Rapids.

All have played from 25 to 40 games and will have a distinct advantage early on, if there's a season, according to coach Mike Babcock.

"The guys that are playing are way ahead of the guys not playing," Babcock said recently at a Children's Hospital team function. "No question about it. They can train off and on the ice as much as they can, but it isn't the same thing as playing every second night."

Which is why the likes of defenseman Ian White, one of the Red Wings skating in Troy — local NHL players Steve Ott, Michael Leighton, Cam Fowler, Kyle Wellwood and Shawn Horcoff also have been regulars — skate 60-90 minutes with full-ice drills, half-ice scrimmages and shooting drills on goaltenders.

They keep sharp, skate until bent over, but admittedly are not where they would be in December during a typical hockey season.

"It always takes a little while to get back to speed," White said. "That's why you have (training) camp and exhibition season. Those guys (in Europe), they're playing good hockey over there and they'll be a bit ahead of us.

"Fortunately we're in pretty good shape and it comes back quick."

Simply put, nothing compares to game action.

The pace, speed and physicality of games, plus the competitive practices in between, are something the players who've remained in North America can't duplicate.

A half-ice, three-on-three scrimmage just doesn't compare to the Russian pro league.

Some of the players who've remained here haven't played in an NHL-like competitive situation since April. Many are also closely following the developments of the lockout, probably more so than their teammates in Europe time zones away, and riding the emotional roller-coaster that experience has become.

"The conditioning, no matter how hard you practice there's nothing like game situations," White said. "You're out there for 20 or 25 minutes, killing penalties and going the extra mile. There are some things you try in practice and stay sharp as passing to hitting, but nothing compares to actually playing in games."

If there is a shortened season — many are predicting 48 games, much like the 1995 lockout produced — the threat of injuries is a real concern, as well.

Some general managers and coaches have hoped for an expanded roster, given the likelihood of many games within a compressed period of time.

Cleary agrees injuries will be a factor, especially with a shortened training camp.

"There's going to be injuries anytime you have a shortened season," Cleary said. "Playing every other night, you're going to have injuries, for sure. It's going to be very important for guys, if they feel anything, to rest rather than having something that's going to keep nagging."

Game Red Wings

Seven Red Wings are currently playing in Europe, while Gustav Nyquist and Brendan Smith are playing for Grand Rapids in the American League and Kyle Quincey is playing in the Central Hockey League, both minor leagues. Here are the Red Wings in Europe:

Pavel Datsyuk (Russia)

Valtteri Filppula (Finland)

Jan Mursak (Slovenia)

Jakub Kindl (Czech Republic)

Henrik Zetterberg (Switzerland)

Damien Brunner (Switzerland)

Drew Miller (Scotland)

Detroit News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646319 Detroit Red Wings

Once again, no progress made in NHL labor talks

By Ira Podell

New York — The latest round of NHL labor talks ended with the two sides in different rooms from each other.

The players' association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million, it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three nonnegotiable points. Instead, the players' association accepted the raise in funds, but then made counterproposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators asked the union on Wednesday, if that proposal was back in play, would the players take it or leave it?

"It wasn't much of a decision," said Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend the talks. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

The offer wasn't actually resubmitted by the NHL. Neither side made any proposals Wednesday.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," players' association executive director Donald Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made."

All games through Dec. 30 have been canceled, about 43 percent of the season, along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic, and the All-Star Game.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

Mediators rejoined the process Wednesday, at the request of the players' association, after they were unable to move the sides any closer to a deal during two days of talks last month.

Whether they will stay involved is uncertain.

"We did several different caucus meeting rooms, and really there's nothing new to report," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said Wednesday, the 88th day of the league's lockout.

After three straight days of talks between the sides ended last Thursday, Fehr began the first of his two news conferences by proclaiming he believed the sides had agreements on such issues as actual dollars, and then returned moments later to reveal the NHL rejected everything his side offered.

The 2004-05 season was lost completely before the players' association accepted a deal that included a salary cap for the first time.

While no major philosophical issues such as that exist in these negotiations, the sides still don't seem be ready to come to an agreement.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in '04-05," Morrison, who played at Michigan, said Wednesday. "Apparently, I was wrong."

Detroit News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646320 Detroit Red Wings

Second round of federal mediation fails to bring NHL, players union closer to labor agreement

Ansar Khan

For the second time in two weeks, federal mediation failed to bring the NHL and the NHLPA players Association any closer to a collective bargaining agreement.

No progress was reported Wednesday after mediator Scot Beckenbaugh met separately with the league and the players union in Iselin, N.J.

"Basically, (the league) left it up to us to decide whether to accept their last proposal," free-agent forward Brendan Morrison told the Newark Star-Ledger and other media covering the meeting. "It wasn't much of a decision."

There was no change in either side's position after talks broke off acrimoniously on Thursday, when NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said the league had pulled all offers off the table.

The league and the players did not meet face-to-face Wednesday, as Beckenbaugh moved from room to room.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said during his media briefing that there was no progress and that there is no proposal on the table.

"We did several different caucus meeting rooms and really there's nothing new to report," Daly told reporters.

Morrison was among 13 players at the meeting, which included no Detroit Red Wings, along with NHLPA executive director Don Fehr and special counsel Steve Fehr. Bettman, Daly and attorneys represented the NHL.

"It's good in a sense we're here and bad in a sense there is no progress,"

"I think discouraged is a good word. Frustrated. It's bargaining. There has to be give and take."

The sides previously met with federal mediators on Nov. 28-29.

"It's frustrating," Chicago Blackhawks forward Jamal Mayers told the New York Daily News and other media at the meetings. "Beyond that, I don't know what to tell you. There's not much you can do when it's take-it-or-leave-it. We'll just have to get back to the drawing board, it feels like.

"To think that we're that close but so far away is extremely frustrating."

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.13.2012

646321 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' bell-ringing efforts raise \$24,438 for Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign

Ansar Khan

Mike Babcock-Ken Holland Red Wings coach Mike Babcock (left) and general manager Ken Holland successfully defended their Salvation Army bell-ringing title. Courtesy of the Detroit Red Wings

The Detroit Red Wings raised a total of \$24,438.69 Tuesday for the Salvation Army, as four pairs of team personnel rang the bell at different locations.

General manager Ken Holland and coach Mike Babcock successfully defended their title by collecting \$13,462 during a two-hour session at Hiller's Market in Northville. Their take included an anonymous donation of \$5,000 and was nearly 38 percent more than they raised a year ago.

"We can't thank Ken Holland, Mike Babcock, some of the team's most beloved former players and the entire Detroit Red Wings organization enough for this fantastic event that has helped move us toward our \$8.5 million 2012 Red Kettle goal," said Major Mark Anderson, general secretary and Metro Detroit area commander for The Salvation Army Eastern Michigan Division. "It was amazing to see just how many fans came out across Metro Detroit to join the Red Wings in this friendly competition to do the most good for the hungry and homeless in our area."

Former Red Wings Chris Chelios and Kris Draper finished second with a total of \$7,400.85, thanks to a few sizable donations at Hockeytown Authentics in Troy, including an anonymous gift of \$5,000.

Ex-goaltenders Manny Legace and Chris Osgood collected \$2,797, staying late to

finish signing autographs for hundreds of fans who showed up at a Kroger in Plymouth.

Radio play-by-play announcer Ken Kal and former player Kirk Maltby received \$778.84 in donations while bell ringing at a Kroger in St. Clair Shores.

The total in contributions was up 42.5 percent from last year. The average red kettle collects \$200 in donations each day and the donations collected by the four pairings in just two hours would equal 122 days of bell ringing.

This season marks the seventh consecutive year the Red Wings and The Salvation Army are teaming up through the "Red Wings for Red Kettles" initiative. Including this year's competition, the team has raised nearly \$70,000 since 2005.

People still wishing to donate can visit www.salmich.org, call (877) SAL-MICH, text "GOODMICH" to 80888(an automatic \$10 donation), or send a check or money order, made payable to The Salvation Army, to: 16130 Northland Dr., Southfield, MI 48075

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.13.2012

646322 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings defenseman Niklas Kronwall among players taking part in Toronto charity game Dec. 19

Ansar Khan

Niklas Kronwall Detroit defenseman Niklas Kronwall will join more than 30 other NHL players for a charity game in Toronto. Ansar Khan/MLive

Detroit Red Wings defenseman Niklas Kronwall, and in all likelihood some of his teammates, will participate in the RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge game Dec. 19 at the Mattamy Athletic Centre in Toronto.

More than 30 NHL players will take part in the five-on-five 60-game game led by Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos and Montreal's P.K. Subban, the RBC Play Hockey ambassadors.

Other players who have committed to play include Dion Phaneuf, Phil Kessel, James Neal, Tomas Kaberle, Mike Komisarek, Logan Couture, Kris Versteeg and John-Michael Liles. The complete rosters will be announced in the next few days.

Tickets will be priced at \$25 (including HST, may be subject to additional fees) and will be available starting at 10 a.m. on Thursday at ticketmaster.ca, charge by phone at (855) 985-5000, and at all Ticketmaster outlets. Proceeds from ticket sales will benefit grassroots hockey initiatives through the NHLPA Goals & Dreams fund and RBC Play Hockey.

The game starts at 7 p.m.

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.13.2012

646323 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton product Smith proves a lot of people wrong

Blazers centre leads WHL in scoring this season after being bypassed by all team at 2011 entry draft

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal December 12, 2012

But that's the story of Smith's life: proving people wrong.

Scouts said the Edmonton-born forward, at five-foot-10 and about 172 pounds, was too small when he got to junior.

Lacking in inches, there has been no shortage of feats for the local lad this season in the Western Hockey League with the Kamloops Blazers.

The 19-year-old centre, who attended Edmonton's Vimy Ridge Hockey Academy, leads the WHL scoring race with 61 points — including the most goals and the most assists — in 35 games.

And he possesses the will to go with the skill.

"You want to prove people wrong and show people what you've got, " said Smith. "I don't think that's ever going to change."

San Jose Sharks amateur scout Brian Gross said Smith "is the engine that runs that train."

That train is the Blazers' top line, which includes right-winger J.C. Lipon, a high-end draft possibility next June, and Tim Bozon, whose dad, Philippe, once played in the NHL.

Gross knows all about kids being overlooked in the draft, which makes scouts look bad.

"We've got a guy, Joe Pavelski, who was a sixth-round draft pick. They said he couldn't skate. But he's got the heart, and the head and the hands to have a 15- or 16-year NHL career, " said Gross.

Nobody's saying Smith will ever be another Pavelski, who played for Team USA at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

But Smith, who attended two Edmonton Oilers camps as a walk-on — a development camp and the main training camp when Tom Renney was head coach — will also never be one of those players who will have coaches begging for more. The Colorado Avalanche took him in Round 7 last June, hardly a huge endorsement, but he could be right up the alley of David Oliver, general manager of the Lake Erie Monsters, the Avalanche's American Hockey League affiliate. He was small when he was an Oiler.

And there's nothing wrong with being picked that late in the draft.

"You know Kelly Buchberger got picked 188th and he played close to 20 NHL years," Smith was told by a reporter.

"Really. Hmm, didn't know that, " said Smith, the former WHL scholastic player of the year, an honours student.

He was one of three Kamloops players to receive that honour. The others are Oilers goalie Devan Dubnyk and future Hall of Famer Scott Niedermayer.

Smith and Buchberger are polar opposites as player types, of course.

Buchberger never came close to leading the WHL in points, but his pilot light was always on.

Smith weighed 135 pounds when he was picked seventh overall in the 2008 bantam draft. He has a much quieter intensity, but the fire is there.

"I took a lot of motivation out of not being drafted (50 WHL points in 2010-11) and thought I had a pretty good year (85 points last season), but it was getting pretty close again, "shrugged Smith, who admits to being a little flummoxed as name after name was called at the 2011 draft — except his.

"Teams all have certain needs, but you definitely wonder, 'what's wrong with me?' " said Smith, who is in his fourth WHL season.

"Made me focus on my game and trying to get better. If you don't, you'll get lost in the shuffle."

But everybody knows who Smith is this season. He's on pace to reach 125 points in 2012-13.

Some NHL amateur scouts think he deserved an invite to Canada's world junior selection camp in Calgary this week. They figured if Lipon, who wasn't drafted last season when eligible for the first time, got an audition, why not his centre?

When Lipon got a cellphone call on the team bus last weekend saying that he was going to Calgary, there was nothing but the sounds of silence for Smith. He felt proud for his linemate and teammate, but they're a package in Kamloops.

Smith was angry after not getting an invite.

"At the time, I was pretty upset. That was a goal of mine for some time to get a shot at it, but I came up short. There's so many great players, I know, but it's still Team Canada. That's a big deal, " said Smith.

He was on Hockey Canada's radar because he had played on the same line at a world under-18 tournament a few years back with current Edmonton Oil Kings centre Travis Ewanyk.

Smith attended Vimy with Oil Kings assistant captain Keegan Lowe, a Carolina Hurricanes draft pick); Craig Simpson's son Dillon, an Oilers pick, Mark McNeill, Chicago Blackhawks first-round selection; Jaynen Rissling, Washington Capitals; Reece Scarlett, New Jersey Devils; and a host of other very ambitious kids.

"Going to the Oiler camp was cool experience, growing up here, so many memories of being a fan, " said Smith.

"I learned a ton, got a little taste of what the next level's about and I realized where I'd have to be (as a player) to get to the NHL.

"I think I have a lot of passion for the game and I've proved a few people wrong so far, but I also know I have a long ways to go. I'm fine with that."

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646324 Edmonton Oilers

Jones: New downtown Edmonton arena back on track?

By Terry Jones, Edmonton Sun

EDMONTON - Aside from Edmonton Oilers owner Daryl Katz being a common denominator — and he's been nowhere to be seen on either front — the NHL lockout and Edmonton's downtown arena deal have a great deal in common.

Unlike the NHL lockout, which got no closer to getting done Wednesday, progress was made on the iconic arena project.

Indeed, if it wasn't for the massive issue of trust and that a twice-done deal twice coming undone, you'd be temped to report that the Edmonton Downtown Arena deal is actually back on track.

It took all ruddy day, with the usual grandstanding by a couple of remarkably ill-informed council members who couldn't ignore 10 times the media than are normally there for more mundane bits of business, and some particularly ludicrous moments involving Linda Sloan, who missed most of the proceedings during the session.

But finally, late in the afternoon, they got around to it and city council voted to resume negotiations, to find a mediator and financial analyst. Mayor Stephen Mandel invited the Katz Group to return Jan. 23.

Led by John Karvellas, the Katz Group appeared to do everything but come in waving a white flag and carrying signs saying "We're sorry!" and "We screwed up" and "No more guns-to-the-head, feet-to-the-fire negotiating."

Karvellas, in requesting a return to the bargaining table between Katz Group and city administration, offered several statements totally foreign to previous Katz negotiations, if you don't count the two full-page newspaper ads he purchased after his failed fake at presenting optics of moving the team to Seattle.

"We are trying to be open and regain the trust we lost a few months back," he said.

"We're not playing games with you, we're not being sneaky. We're trying to regain the trust that we lost. We realized coming in here today that we had a trust issue, that what we put forward was not believed, " he said.

But after the four years of dealing with Katz and the continuous political pratfalls there wasn't an "Oh, well, OK then" sort of response.

Even Kim Krushell, one of the most solid of supporters of the downtown arena project, reacted to that with reasonable reservations.

"I agree with you, Mr. Karvellas that a trust issue is a concern. We have to make sure we don't have a repeat of what we've seen in the past. I just want to get a sense — are you prepared to be reasonable going forward? I thought we had a deal, "she said and asked if the Katz Group is prepared to "put everything on the table".

Karvellas's first move was to take away the "ask" that caused the latest train wreck and resulted in Mayor Mandel shutting down negotiations two months ago

"We will not look for a subsidy as previously requested," Karvellas said of no longer seeking \$6 million in operating costs annually from the city, but going back to negotiating off the framework of the October 2011 deal agreed to in the office of NHL commissioner Gary Bettman in New York.

Instead Karvellas offered the, uh, suggestion that if the downtown project creates a significant excess in expected tax revenues over and above reasonable projections, it be directed to an "arena reserve fund" to be drawn on for operations.

And in there somewhere is where the trust issues are going to be significant. Is that essentially the same ask in different wrapping paper? Or a whole new, reasonable, request?

The Katz Group proposed they would submit their numbers to an independent third party for analysis if city would do the same with their numbers.

Bottom line?

Mayor Mandel pretty much supplied that himself.

"I'll be very frank. We have not solved the problems that were there four years ago, " he said.

"It's encouraging the Katz Group came and showed their passion and commitment to get something done. Hopefully we can.

"The Oilers are Edmonton's hockey team and we want to make the deal that's best for Edmontonians. This is about finding an answer to a problem we all want to solve.

"It's about the numbers. It's about the money. We need to clear up the air, if this is a financial good deal or a bad deal. I think there's a deal to be made."

It's really the same story as the lockout.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646325 Florida Panthers

Hockey fans fed up with ongoing NHL labor strife

By DAN GELSTON

Sitting in a hockey locker room, Steve Chase became the latest die-hard fan fed up with the NHL lockout.

Living in Los Angeles, Chase believed the league had squandered all the goodwill built in the area after the Kings won the Stanley Cup. His weekly pickup games with friends became his only taste of the sport he loved because of the ongoing labor strife that has dragged on for months.

So he took a poll of his buddies, then took a pledge:

"We're not coming back."

Not for good. Just not after the lockout is settled, not for a while.

Chase started the grass roots "Just Drop It" campaign that encourages fans to boycott one NHL game for every game canceled after Dec. 21st. No tickets, no TV, no merchandise - not a minute or a penny spent on the league, punishment for what he believed are continued abuses of loyalty on their fan base.

He made a video and started a Facebook page, urging fans to click the "like" button and join the cause. More than 11,000 angry fans have joined since the weekend, a puck drop in the circle compared to the millions of fans who attend games, but the latest small sign fans won't again be easily won back.

"People are trying to crush the NHL," Chase said. "That's not our goal. Our goal is just to get hockey back. Hopefully somebody, somewhere cares about this and decides, 'Guys, we've got to get back and talk.' The fans are right.

"They're fighting over our money."

The days of letter writing and 30-second phone calls to sports radio stations have ballooned to steady streams of hashtags, Facebook posts and homemade videos from fans who just want to come in from the cold of this labor battle and watch their slap shots and saves. They are exasperated over a work stoppage with no end in sight and little regard for the fans.

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby understood why fans are upset over the third lockout in Commissioner Gary Bettman's 20-year tenure.

"I don't blame anyone for being frustrated with this process," Crosby said. "Everyone's got to be frustrated with the way this has gone. It's pretty easy for everyone involved to feel that way."

Kind of like they sing in a song about union executive director Donald Fehr's old sport, some fans vow it's one, two, three lockouts and they're out.

"I wouldn't blame them if they did that by any stretch," Penguins forward Craig Adams said, "but I can't predict that."

It's actually pretty easy to call this shot.

For all the angry tweets, texts, threats and organized campaigns, fans will still pick up the remote and print out tickets as soon as the strife ends.

They always do. In every sport. Remember 1994? After the World Series was wiped out, baseball loyalists vowed never to return to the old ball game. Fueled by super-sized sluggers and retro ballparks, attendance topped 60 million in 1996, 70 million in 1998 and soared to 79,503,175 in 2007.

The NHL, of course, can't match those numbers. But the story arc is still the same. The NHL drew 20,854,169 fans when the sport returned in 2005-06 - 497,970 more than the total in 2003-04, the season before the lockout.

The NHL saw an attendance uptick each of the next three seasons and totaled a record 21,468,121 fans in 2011-12.

Fans are filling stadiums from A (Air Canada) to X (Xcel Energy) and most geographic points in between. If there are fans still holding out over the lost season and refusing to step foot inside an NHL arena, they're at least throwing on their oversized Winter Classic sweaters and watching from home.

The 2004 Stanley Cup finals between the Tampa Bay Lightning and Calgary Flames averaged 3.286 million viewers on ABC/ESPN, the Nielsen company said. Those numbers actually dipped in 2006 and 2007 when Carolina and Anaheim, two nontraditional hockey markets, won the Cup.

When hockey-mad cities like Pittsburgh, Detroit, Philadelphia and Chicago all reached the finals, though, the ratings soared. The Blackhawks-Flyers series in 2010 on NBC/Versus averaged 5.167 million viewers, the highest for the finals since 2002, Nielsen said.

The NHL is coming off its sixth consecutive year of record revenue, with a projection of more than \$3.2 billion by the end of the 2012 Stanley Cup playoffs, the league said.

Don't forget, the NHL has a \$2 billion, 10-year deal with NBC Sports Group through the 2020-21 season.

"Our fan support coming back last time was outstanding and we were probably a little bit surprised to see how good it was," Adams said. "That speaks to how much the fans love the game."

The NHL clearly caught some breaks coming out of the last lockout.

The league marketed its comeback around rising stars like Crosby and Washington's Alex Ovechkin. They added fan-friendly shootouts and the New Year's Day Winter Classic. The league made the two-line pass legal to help bust up the neutral-zone trap and created chic commercials to appeal more toward casual fans.

This time - whenever the lockout ends - the league might be all out of tricks. They'll need to dig. And it could take years to recover from the wreckage.

Some teams are trying to keep their brand alive among an increasingly uninterested public. The Flyers aired classic games and brought back former stars for autograph signings at a sports bar in the same complex as the Wells Fargo Center.

Gerry Helper, special assistant to the president and senior vice president for the Nashville Predators, said the team enjoyed their best season ticket renewal year in franchise history this past offseason.

The Predators have stayed aggressive in developing benefits packages for season ticketholders during the work stoppage. They organized "Preds Pride Day" activities and something called a "Smashmob" for a youth hockey game last month where they brought their public address announcer and mascot, and created a Predators' game-like atmosphere. Helper wrote in an email to The AP the Predators have stayed in touch with season ticket holders via email and phone.

Not every Predators fan feels appreciated. Tom Begley, of Franklin, Tenn., canceled the two season tickets he has held since Day 1 of the franchise. He also estimated approximately 1,000 people like himself are season-ticket holders from the first day. He said the team has done plenty of events for all season-ticket holders, but nothing special for that select group.

"I got not even a phone call from the Predators just to say, 'Look we know you're a loyal die-hard season-ticket holder from Day 1. Why don't you come down and do something at the arena?" he said. "Hey, if I feel like it down the line and I want to buy tickets again I can do it. Right now, I don't know. I'm not convinced that hockey here in Nashville is going to be viable long-term. I am scared to death of what Donald Fehr is doing to the game and it's a shame. It really is."

In Pennsylvania, the government is getting involved in the messy dispute.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Bob Casey on Wednesday urged the U.S. Small Business Administration to provide additional assistance to Pittsburgh and Philadelphia businesses that have been adversely affected by the lockout. Casey claimed small business in Pittsburgh are losing nearly half of the \$2.1 million in revenue generated for each Penguins home game. He wrote Philadelphia is losing \$1 million in revenue from each lost home game.

All the bluster of a boycott is easier tweeted than done. Fans can't quit Sid the Kid, Ovi, Big Z, The Warden, Phil the Thrill and The Doaner.

On Opening Night in January 2013 or October 2013 or November 2015, whenever, the teams will be back ready for the first faceoff.

So will the fans.

At least some of them.

Miami Herald LOADED: 12.13.2012

646326 Florida Panthers

NHL, union remain apart on issues and in meetings

By IRA PODELL

NEW YORK -- The latest round of NHL labor talks ended with the two sides in different rooms from each other.

The players' association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three nonnegotiable points. Instead, the players' association accepted the raise in funds, but then made counterproposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators asked the union on Wednesday, if that proposal was back in play, would the players take it or leave it?

"It wasn't much of a decision," said Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend Wednesday's talks. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

The offer wasn't actually resubmitted by the NHL. Neither side made any proposals Wednesday.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," players' association executive director Donald Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made."

All games through Dec. 30 have been canceled, about 43 percent of the season, along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic, and the All-Star game.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

Mediators rejoined the process Wednesday, at the request of the players' association, after they were unable to move the sides any closer to a deal during two days of talks last month.

Whether they will stay involved is uncertain.

"We did several different caucus meeting rooms, and really there's nothing new to report," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said Wednesday, the 88th day of the league's lockout. "We don't have a conclusion to the process."

After three straight days of talks between the sides ended last Thursday, Fehr began the first of his two news conferences by proclaiming he believed the sides had agreements on such issues as actual dollars, and then returned moments later to reveal the NHL rejected everything his side offered.

The 2004-05 season was lost completely before the players' association accepted a deal that included a salary cap for the first time. While no major philosophical issues such as that exist in these negotiations, the sides still don't seem be ready to come to an agreement.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 04-05," Morrison said Wednesday. "Apparently, I was wrong."

A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January. Bettman said he wouldn't have a season shorter than that.

The NHL wants to limit personal player contracts to five years, seven for a club to re-sign its own player, and has elevated the issue to the highest level of importance. The union countered with an offer of an eight-year maximum length with the variable in salary being no greater than a 25 percent difference between the highest-paid year of the deal and the lowest.

The other sticking points the NHL demanded of the players are a 10-year term on the new agreement, with a mutual opt-out option after eight years, and no compliance buy-outs or caps on escrow in the transition phase to the new structure. The union presented an offer of an eight-year deal with a reopener after six.

No owners were with Bettman and Daly on the NHL side Wednesday, but the union had plenty of players in tow: Morrison, Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Douglas Murray, and Daniel Winnik.

Miami Herald LOADED: 12.13.2012

646327 Los Angeles Kings

Mediation meetings don't help NHL talks

The latest round of NHL labor talks ended with the two sides in different rooms.

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NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

ETC.

Sanchez Sola is new Chivas USA coach

Former Mexican League coach Jose Luis Sanchez Sola was selected as the new coach of Chivas USA, the troubled Major League Soccer team that hasn't made the playoffs in three seasons.

Sanchez Sola, 53, formerly ran the youth program and then the first-division Mexican team in Puebla, reaching the Clausura semifinals in 2009. With Chivas USA he replaces Robin Fraser, who won 15 games in two years, suffering through a franchise-worst 14-game winless streak to end last season.

-Kevin Baxter

Skip Schumaker passed a physical examination to finalize his trade to the Dodgers from the St. Louis Cardinals.

In exchange for the 32-year-old utility man, the Dodgers sent the Cardinals light-hitting double-A shortstop Jake Lemmerman. The Dodgers designated Scott Van Slyke for assignment to clear a spot on the 40-man roster for Schumaker.

Schumaker, a career .288 hitter, is expected to provide the Dodgers with depth at second base and all three outfield positions.

—Dylan Hernandez

The blockbuster trade that sent Adrian Gonzalez, Josh Beckett and Carl Crawford from Boston to the Dodgers in August will wrap up with the Red Sox paying \$11.7 million to the Dodgers over the next three years.

Texas Tech brought back former Red Raiders quarterback Kliff Kingsbury to become the head football coach.

Kingsbury was the offensive coordinator at Texas A&M, coaching Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Manziel this year, and was the first in a string of record-setting quarterbacks for the Red Raiders under former coach Mike Leach.

He has never been a head coach and at 33, he'll be one of the youngest in major-college football.

An internal investigation into a former player's allegations of abuse by Washington State football coaches didn't turn up any evidence of such abuse, Athletic Director Bill Moos said.

A dozen players were interviewed by two members of Moos' staff, and all reported they were having a positive experience at Washington State under Leach, the head coach, and his assistants, Moos said.

Star receiver Marquess Wilson quit the team during a practice late in the season and later contended that players were suffering physical and mental abuse by coaches.

Alabama quarterback AJ McCarron, who has led the Crimson Tide to its second straight national title game, said he will return for his senior season instead of making himself available for the NFL draft.

Sacramento center DeMarcus Cousins was suspended for one game without pay by the NBA for striking Dallas' O.J. Mayo in the groin area in the Kings' road loss Monday night.

Cousins sat out the Kings' game Wednesday night at Milwaukee.

Abby Wambach scored twice to become only the second American woman to reach 150 international goals, and the United States beat China, 4-0, in a soccer exhibition at Houston.

LA Times: LOADED: 12.13.2012 646328 Los Angeles Kings

NHL labor talks resume in undisclosed location

By Ira Podell, Associated Press

nEW YORK -- Talks between the NHL and the union are back under way for the first time in nearly a week as the sides again search for a deal to save the hockey season.

Federal mediators are rejoining negotiations being held Wednesday in an undisclosed location under a media blackout. The union, however, has released the names of those players who are taking part in the discussions. They include Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers, Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Brendan Morrison, Douglas Murray, and Daniel Winnik.

It is believed that no owners are accompanying Commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly on the NHL side.

The talks, being held on the 88th day of the league's lockout, are the first inperson discussions between the sides since last Thursday when bargaining broke down

All games through Dec. 30 have been canceled.

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

There are also secondary issues yet to be agreed on, including the continued participation of NHL players in the Olympics, the international calendar and drug-testing rules.

LA Daily News: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646329 Minnesota Wild

NHL, NHLPA done for the day, no progress reported

Posted by: Michael Russo

Today's meeting between the NHL and NHLPA with mediators has concluded in New Jersey after 6 1/2 hours.

The sides met separately with mediators and were never in the same room. No progress was made.

According to NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly, there is no re-tabled offer on the table (although that's been contradicted and players say the league offered last week's take it or leave it deal again; league says mediatoractually is the one who said 'would you re-offer it'). There are no plans yet as to when the two sides will meet again.

The mediator will meet with the players tonight, and then the mediators will get in touch with the league as to what was discussed.

I'm told the league spent about 15 or 20 minutes with mediators today and hours with the players because the league made clear there's no communication issue, that their stance is clear: "tell us when you're ready to play." My guess is that could be under the last proposal, although the league has not actually said that.

That proposal was 50/50, 10-year CBA, \$300 million Make Whole, 5-year max deals (7 to re-sign your own player) and 5% variances in salary per year.

In other words, the owners are done negotiating. Unless they're bluffing, the next move will have to come from the players deciding if they want to throw away 100 percent of their salaries because they want an 8-year CBA or a little longer term in a max deal. Transition rules also must be determined.

Brendan Morrison was quoted by Tom Gulitti (the Record, @tgulitti): "I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 04-05. Apparently, I was wrong. I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition vet. so we have to keep working."

According to Morrison via Gulitti, the players had to make a decision today whether to take the NHL's last proposal last week (the one the league claimed it was taking off the table), and "It wasn't much of a decision."

Again though, the league denies that proposal was ever actually re-tabled.

Fun, isn't this?

So, in conclusion, they tried a mediator two weeks ago. Went nowhere. Went without a mediator last week and made some progress, went back to a mediator and made no progress.

Why? Because mediators go from room to room asking, "what if they did this" questions. The league knows what it wants. It's made that position clear to the union, like it or not. So for them, mediation is not working because both sides aren't miscommunicating with each other. Both sides know what the other wants.

The league is at the take it or leave it stage of this lockout.

I still believe these guys get a deal done. It's just a matter of when. League needs to announce a drop-dead date, which my guess is Jan. 15 to play a 48-game schedule. If that's the case, early January a deal must be done.

Announce it already, apply a pressure point and see what happens.

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.13.2012 646330 Montreal Canadiens

NHL labour talks produce little to talk about

JAMES MIRTLE

TORONTO — The Globe and Mail

Day 1 of the second round of mediation accomplished little as the NHL lockout stretches to the end of its third month.

The league and NHL Players' Association met in separate groups with mediators at the U.S. Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service's sub-regional office in Iselin, N.J., on Wednesday.

But the only news to come out of the sessions was: a) the league's offer from last week is, at least for now, off the table; and b) they could be meeting again this week, as the mediation process continues.

Unlike last week's talks, which pushed negotiations forward until they hit another stalemate late in the proceedings, no franchise owners were in attendance Wednesday.

The NHL, however, told players through the mediators it was willing only to go as far as offering what had already been discussed.

"Basically, they left it up to us to decide whether to accept their last proposal," Brendan Morrison, a free agent who most-recently played for the Chiacago Blackhawks, told reporters in attendance at what was supposed to be a secret location.

"It wasn't much of a decision."

"Really, there's nothing new to report, " NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said.

The main sticking points between the two sides remain the same: The league wants a long-term collective agreement (eight to 10 years), limitations on long-term deals (five years for free agents, seven for players

under contract), and no "transition mechanisms," such as compliance buyouts that wouldn't count against the cap.

The players have countered with a six-to-eight-year collective agreement and eight-year contract limits. The discussion of transitioning from a \$70-million (U.S.) salary cap down to the \$60-million range, which would come due to the players' share of revenues shrinking to 50 per cent, hasn't progressed further than the NHL insisting it doesn't want any money spent outside of the cap.

While there was no progress made in talks, some small further details emerged about what was proposed last week on some of the other outstanding issues.

The NHLPA, for example, agreed to a formula that would potentially punish teams with players on existing contracts with seven or more years remaining. The proposal would mean if players on those long-term deals retired early, their teams would be faced with a "cap-benefit recapture" that would put a penalty on their cap equal to the savings they received over the life of the deal.

That stands as just one example of the incremental gains made between the two sides last week, something that prompted widespread optimism in the hockey world that there will still be an abbreviated 48-game season, beginning in early January.

Players in attendance at Wednesday's mediation sessions, however, pointed out they were surprised the standoff had lasted as long as it has.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in '04-05," Morrison said, comparing this lockout to the one that cancelled a full season eight years ago. "Apparently, I was wrong."

"To think that we're that close but so far away is extremely frustrating," Blackhawks forward Jamal Mayers added.

The 13 players in attendance at Wednesday's meetings were: Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Douglas Murray, Daniel Winnik, Morrison and Mayers.

Commissioner Gary Bettman, Daly and the league's legal team were on hand for the NHL.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.13.2012

646331 Montreal Canadiens

Habs' prospect Bozon could bring French flavour

By Pat Hickey, The Gazette December 12, 2012

MONTREAL — Ask Guy Charron about Canadiens prospect Tim Bozon and he'll start by talking about the youngster's determination.

"It's quite a decision for a young man from Europe to come over and play in the (Canadian Hockey League), "Charron said. "It's a big adjustment in the way the game is played and learning to adapt to a new language and culture, but he's handled it very well."

Bozon, who was selected by the Canadiens in the third round (64th overall) at this year's National Hockey League entry draft, had a successful rookie season with the Kamloops Blazers. He averaged a point a game, with 36 goals and 35 assists in 71 Western Hockey League games, and was a plus-27.

Charron, who coaches the Blazers, said Bozon has been building on that solid foundation.

"There's never been any question about his offensive skills, but he's learning to be more of an all-around player, " said Charron, whose resumé includes stints with the Canadiens as a player and an assistant coach. "He has determination, and if he continues to improve I think he can be a good NHL player. I don't want to say that he'll be another Luc Robitaille, but his game is similar."

Bozon's story is a bit different because he comes from France, a country that has produced only a handful of NHL players. Fortunately for Bozon,

one of those players was his father, Philippe, who has proved to be an excellent role model.

Bozon père also showed his determination when he left France to play with St. Jean in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. He went on to become the first French-born player in the NHL, playing 144 games over four seasons with the St. Louis Blues in the early 1990s.

Tim Bozon was born in St. Louis, but spent his formative years in Europe. He split the year between summers in France and winters in Switzerland, where his father played and later coached.

When he was drafted by the Canadiens in June, Bozon said his transition to North America was made easier because there are a large number of North Americans who play in the Swiss League.

The younger Bozon said he decided to follow in his dad's skate tracks when he was 16 and declared his eligibility for the CHL import draft.

"We had some contact with his agent and we knew his father, but there was no guarantee that we would have a chance to draft him," said Charron, who said the Blazers were fortunate when Bozon was available as the 27th pick in the first round of the WHL draft.

"He didn't take much time to fit in, " Charron added. "He makes friends quickly. We have him playing on the top line and he has good chemistry with Colin Smith and J.C. Lipon."

In fact, Charron said sometimes the chemistry is too good.

"I had to take him aside last week and encourage him to shoot more," Charron said. "The next few weeks will be good for him because (Lipon) will be with the Canadian junior team and Tim will be asked to do more."

Bozon is ahead of last season's pace with 17 goals and 27 assists in 34 games and is a plus-22. He said his strong plus-minus numbers are a matter of a good offence being the best defence.

"When we're on the ice, we control the puck a lot, "Bozon said. "We don't give the other team a chance to score against us."

Bozon has represented France in international competition, but the country didn't qualify for the world junior championship later this month in Russia. France is the host for the second-tier Division I Group A junior championship, but Bozon declined an invitation to lead a weak French team after discussing the matter with his agent, the Blazers and, presumably, the Canadiens.

"We just decided that it would be best for my development if I stayed here, " he said.

While there are questions about whether he takes full advantage of his size, Bozon said he has been working to get bigger and stronger.

"I've added about 15 pounds since the draft, " said Bozon, bringing him close to 200 pounds on a 6-foot-1 frame.

Bozon attended the Canadiens' development camp after he was drafted in June and had been looking forward to making an impression at the NHL training camp, which was cancelled because of the lockout.

But the Canadiens are keeping tabs on Bozon.

"(Director of player development Martin Lapointe) has asked me for some tape and we'll send him some of his better games and some of his not-so-good games, " Charron said.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 12.13.2012

646332 Montreal Canadiens

31 Carey Price masks = 31 charities

By Dave Stubbs, The Gazette December 12, 2012

MONTREAL — Carey Price happily reports that he's showing improvement in his ability to play the action-adventure video game Assassin's Creed III. That's probably a good thing, given that the Canadiens goaltender is a high-profile poster-boy for the enormously popular game.

And now, as Price hones his AC III expertise on his Xbox, 31 charities from coast to coast in Canada will benefit from his partnership with the game's creator.

Thirty-one full-sized helmet masks themed to AC III are being auctioned online through Sunday, every one attached to a charity. Price will sign each for auction winners at a gala Montreal dinner on Jan. 31, an event that will have the goalie, many of his Canadiens teammates and a number of Habs legends mingling with hundreds of ticket-buying guests.

Every dollar raised from the mask auction will go to their linked charities, with another significant sum divided evenly among the 31 groups from dinner ticket sales and live and silent auctions to be held that night.

The Price/Assassin's Creed III connection is a joint project of Montreal-based game creator Ubisoft and Wess Perisa, who works with a number of NHL players — including Price and fellow Canadiens Josh Gorges, Max Pacioretty and Travis Moen — and their agents to create and broker business and charitable partnerships.

Perisa is a clearing house of sorts for the proposals that cross agents' desks, separating the wheat from the chaff while independently developing ideas and executing projects that range from autograph sessions to corporate endorsements.

Ubisoft's latest instalment in its massively popular Assassin's Creed franchise stars Ratonhnhaké: ton, more commonly known as Connor, an American Revolution warrior born to a First Nations mother and British father

Of course, Price has First Nations blood from his mother, Lynda, a former chief of the Ulkatcho in northern B.C.

"Ubisoft wanted to team up with Carey because of Connor's bloodlines. They were really keen on tying in with Carey because they thought it would be a really unique partnership, "said Perisa, whose business platform hockeyhelps.com brings under one roof the charitable efforts of all players he represents and supports other groups with their charity initiatives.

Three professional mask designers/painters created three mask versions, themed in the Canadiens red, white or blue using AC III artwork produced by Ubisoft. Fans then were given the chance to vote on their favourite.

The white model prevailed — "It was my favourite from the start," Price says — and that design is now on the 31 full-sized auction masks, created by renowned Swedish mask artist/painter David Gunnarsson of Daveart Designs.

Among the charities to benefit from this sale and related dinner gala — their number not coincidentally matches that on Price's jersey — are many that touch the lives of Montrealers.

Of specific local note are nine masks, those attached to the children's foundations of the Canadiens, Montreal General Hospital and Hôpital Ste-Justine, Quebec Society for Disabled Children, Mile-End Mission, Centraide, Club des petits déjeuners, Make-A-Wish Québec, and Opération Enfant Soleil (part of the Children's Miracle Network).

Price didn't need convincing when the fundraising idea was pitched to him.

"When my agent (Gerry Johansson) and Wess put it to me, and they told me 31 charities would benefit, it was kind of a no-brainer," Price said. "It was an opportunity to promote the game and for me to support 31 charities."

Perisa said he's done many individual events with Price to raise funds for charity

"But something for 31 at once is pretty bold," he said. "For this, we need all hands on deck, each of the 31 supporting it."

For Price, meanwhile, there's work ahead on learning the complex AC III. It wouldn't be good form for him to be embarrassed by a young gamer to whom sunlight is only a detergent beside the basement washing machine.

"I'm not the best at the game, but I have improved dramatically since I received it, " Price said with a laugh.

He says he'll play AC III once or twice a week for a couple hours, "usually when I'm just lounging around on a weekend. I've got it on the Xbox, so I go down there and veg out for awhile."

Price is not yet certain whether he'll be able to wear an AC III-themed mask into a game (whenever that might be), given NHL regulations on sponsorship and uniforms.

A few seasons ago, then with the Colorado Avalanche, the mask of current Canadiens backup Peter Budaj featured the likeness of Assassin's Creed character Altaïr, though Budaj wasn't being paid to endorse the game.

"I'll have to talk this over with the NHL, " Price said. "Hopefully, it will be this season."

This goalie, it seems, is the most warm-blooded assassin you're likely to find.

"This really is a good project," Price said. "It's great to be able to help so many people."

Bid on any of 31 Carey Price-themed Assassin's Creed III masks at hockeyhelps.com. Auction ends Sunday, Dec. 16 at 1 p.m. ET for mask No. 31, bidding for the other 30 closing in reverse order through the afternoon. Details on the Jan. 31 dinner event coming soon at the same website.

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646333 Montreal Canadiens

Habs' Gorges promoting retail store

By Dave Stubbs, The Gazette December 12, 2012

MONTREAL — "If people are coming to me for fashion advice, " Josh Gorges was saying, "they're coming to the wrong person."

And the Canadiens defenceman laughed at the very thought.

Gorges spent a couple of hours late Tuesday afternoon mingling with shoppers and fans at the RW&CO. store in Place Ville Marie, not dispensing sartorial wisdom as much as autographed pictures.

The man knows his strengths, and the greatest one in a situation like this was his gift of gab, an effortless ability to put star-struck kids, adults and, most importantly, young women at ease.

Gorges wore jeans, a red, white and grey checked shirt and a charcoal sweater straight off the store's shelves. Truth be told, he had been in on Saturday to pick out a few things that put him in the product of RW&CO., a Canadian contemporary fashion retailer that dresses men and women in "things that make you look good and dressy but casual," he said.

"Alex Burrows (of the Canucks) did something like this appearance out in Vancouver and they were looking for someone to do the same sort of thing in Montreal, " Gorges said, tracing his involvement.

"Alex threw my name to them, they called and asked if I'd be interested and I said, 'Absolutely. I have a lot of spare time on my hands.'"

The appearance came together quickly with hockeyhelps.com, which represents Gorges's off-ice interests, producing an RW&CO. news release announcing that Montrealers would be invited to "shop alongside" the Habs defencemen

"They'll have to ask someone else in the store for advice," Gorges joked the night before his appearance. "I think I'm just there to hang out, meet and greet, take some pictures and sign some autographs.

"As far as I know, I'm going in to help promote their store."

Which is precisely what he did.

"I always think these things are a good way to hang out with a bunch of fans," Gorges said. "You get to meet people who have a story about why they're fans. You always hear from one who says they're the Canadiens' biggest fan and you want to know why that is, because a week earlier you'd heard someone claiming the same thing.

"It's fun to meet and interact with people who watch you play but who you never get a chance to meet."

In professional hockey's large barn of free-spending, magnificently attired clothes horses, Gorges is not, well, Secretariat. He freely admits it, and he's entirely comfortable with his own style.

"I'm not a huge shopper. I don't know much of anything when it comes to clothes," he admitted.

Though he says he owns 13 suits, that total including a few destined for giveaway, Gorges is stumped when you ask him his jacket size.

That's probably not unusual, given a pro hockey player's unique body type. Square-shouldered, broad of chest, narrow-waisted and generously beamed with thick legs, most haven't a prayer of fitting the six-inch drop between jacket and pant size in a standard suit, or even the eight-inch drop of an athletic cut.

"I haven't gotten a suit off the rack since I've been in the league, " said Gorges, who will begin his eighth NHL season when/if the lockout ends. "I go in, they size me up and they make it. I don't even ask them what size it is "

He does, however, know he wears a Size 33 or 34 in jeans, the item he says that's the toughest fit for a hockey player.

"Ask anyone and they'll tell you the same thing," Gorges said. "Most of us have regular waist sizes compared to a regular guy. But our butt and legs are twice the size of a normal person. The jeans will fit around the waist but will be so tight on the legs that you can't even walk in them. So you either go up a waist size or just suck up how tight they are."

And startlingly little of Gorges's 6-foot-1 physique is in his legs, limbs which blocked almost every one of his league-leading 250 shots last season. He's got just a 32-inch inseam, and even that sometimes requires hemming.

Gorges says he has almost exactly the same leg length as 5-foot-7 captain Brian Gionta.

"Josh has short legs but a long torso, " Gionta confirmed. "Weirdest thing

Gorges was laughing again: "The guys are giving it to me all the time — I'm all upper body. It doesn't help me skating out there, that's for sure."

If he can't tell you his jacket size, Gorges can tell you when he first wore a suit and knotted a tie.

"The first suit was when I played in bantam back home in Kelowna," he recalled. "We were playing in a tournament and the guys thought it would be cool to act like we were junior players. None of us had suits, so I wore one of my dad's. It was about 10 years old at the time, double-breasted. A little big? Oh man, it was hanging off me."

Gorges was 13 or 14, at the counter of his father's Dairy Queen in Kelowna, when he first tied a thick Windsor knot.

"Every once in awhile I had to go into the DQ with my dad before I'd play on a Saturday morning, then come back to the store to help out until he finished work," Gorges said. "My uncle, who was in there with my dad, taught me how to knot a tie so I could work those couple of hours."

Gorges no longer leaves his ties knotted to hang on a doorknob.

"I was lazy and I didn't realize what that does to your ties, " he said, laughing again. "But there are still guys at our level who don't know how to knot a tie. If it comes open, they'll ask for help and someone will have to tie it for them."

Gorges says, without elaboration, that there's been one of those players in Montreal, since gone, during his five seasons here.

Gorges has never worn a bow tie and says he won't be wearing one for his wedding next summer.

"Some guys can pull off that look," he said, "and some can't."

But Gorges won't walk to the altar in denim and a T-shirt, the wardrobe of preference to which he could have spoken with authority among his fans on Tuesday at RW&CO.

"My fiancée is trying to get me looking a little more grown up, if that's the expression, a little more stylish with some sweaters and nice shirts," he said. "I'm starting to evolve, dressing more like an adult than a kid.

"But at heart? I'm a jeans and T-shirt kind of guy."

In a downtown fashion store on Tuesday, in "casual chicwear, " as he put it, Gorges cleaned up pretty well indeed.

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646334 New Jersey Devils

NHL and Players' Association meet but make no progress or new proposal made

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

Once again, a federal mediator could not move the NHL and its players closer to a new collective bargaining agreement.

Scot Beckenbaugh, deputy director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, presided over 6½ hours of talks today at a FMCS subregional office in Iselin. However, the two sides were never together in the same room and the lockout is no closer to an end after 88 days.

"The mediator was in both rooms," former Devils forward Brendan Morrison reported, "but there was just no progress.

"It's good in sense that we're here having some dialogue with the mediator, but bad in a sense that there is no progression."

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly echoed Morrison's comment.

"We met for about 6½ hours today with the assistance of federal mediator Scot Beckenbaugh, and the parties were actually never in the same room together," Daly said. "We did several different caucus meeting rooms and really there is nothing new to report. We don't have a conclusion to the process."

Players' Association executive director Don Fehr suggested the league has not made a new proposal.

"All I'm going to say is there wasn't any change in position," Fehr said. "There were a number of meetings each side had with the mediator today. We also had caucuses on our own and I assume the league personnel did also. There were discussions on the various issues, how far apart we are and where we go from here. I can't tell you any progress was made."

Don Fehr and NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr planned to stay in touch with the federal mediator, but there were no immediate plans for the resumption of talks Thursday.

"Certainly there is a chance of it. I can't tell you whether it's going to happen," Don Fehr said. "(It would depend on) a joint belief there is a reasonable chance you can accomplish something doing it rather than proceeding in different directions."

Daly, commissioner Gary Bettman and league attorney Bob Batterman represented the owners in the meetings while Don and Steve Fehr were joined by 13 players including Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers, Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Brendan Morrison, Douglas Murray and Daniel Winnik.

Despite reports that the league's last proposal remained on the table, Daly said: "No, there is not a proposal on the table."

Morrison said: "I wasn't aware of that. When we left the meeting with the mediator we were told that package was still on the table. Then the mediator went to speak with the league. Obviously that's what they decided to do."

There was little optimism in the building just off the Garden State Parkway.

"I think discouraged is a good word to use. Frustrated," Morrison said. "It's bargaining. It has to be give and take. It just can't be give and it just can't be take from one side or the other.

"I never though the issues were as big as they were back in '04-05. Apparently I was wrong. I thought the gap would be closed much quicker but it hasn't come to fruition yet. We just have to keep working."

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646335 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout update: NHL, NHLPA meet; Donald Fehr says 'no change in position'

Charles Curtis, NJ.com

Once again, the phrase "no progress" was invoked to describe another collective bargaining agreement meeting.

The Star-Ledger's Rich Chere reported from New Jersey that deputy commissioner Bill Daly said "the two sides were never in the same room at the same time," with a mediator running the proceedings.

Daly also said there is no proposal at the moment and no talks scheduled for now.

Donald Fehr had a similar message, telling the media there was "no change in positions," according to the CBC's Elliotte Friedman.

"I don't know what to tell you," Blackhawks forward Jamal Mayers said, via The Daily News' Pat Leonard. "There's not much you can do when it's take-it-or-leave-it. We'll just have to get back to the drawing board, it feels like. To think that we're that close but so far away is extremely frustrating."

What is it exactly that the NHL wanted? Leonard said it's "a package deal, with emphasis on player contract term limits and the length of the next collective bargaining agreement."

There are other reports as to what the union and owners are trying to negotiate. The Candian Press' Chris Johnston said player contract buyouts are an issue, something that was part of the league after the last lockout ended.

"Unlike in 2004-05, when the league first adopted the salary cap, owners don't feel there is any need to have a round of buyouts that aren't counted against a team's annual limit," he wrote. "If no special transition rules end up making their way into the new CBA, a number of teams would be forced to get creative with their rosters."

Not all the news from today was discouraging. Via Puck Daddy's Greg Wyshynski, hockey agent Gareth Chalmers said on Twitter that European teams with NHL players have been told "to get ready to return within the next week. One GM told me today that a contact of his in the NHL has advised that they are now looking at 2nd January restart."

There's also time even beyond that date to end the lockout and have a season, if you believe what Red Wings forward Danny Cleary told Detroit News' Ted Kulfan: "If nothing is going on by Jan. 15, that would be for me an end-all. It has to be. I know they canceled Feb. 16 last time, but it's not fathomable to have a season at that point. You can't have a 35-game season."

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.13.2012 646336 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout: No progress after 6 1/2 hours with federal mediator

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

A federal mediator presided over 6 1/2 hours of talks today in Iselin, N.J., but NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said there was no progress towards a new collective bargaining agreement with the Players' Association.

Daly said the two sides were never in the same room at the same time. He said the league expected to hear from the players after they meet on their own with Don and Steve Fehr late this afternoon.

"We met for about 6 1/2 hours today with the assistance of federal mediator Scot Beckenbaugh, and the parties were actually never in the same room together," Daly said. "We did several different caucus meeting rooms and really there is nothing new to report. We don't have a conclusion to the process.

"I think the players are doing something tonight and they're going to get back to mediator Beckenbaugh tonight and he'll get back to us tonight."

The players, along with NHLPA executive director Don Fehr and special counsel Steve Fehr, held their own meeting just after 5 p.m.

Despite reports that the league's last proposal remains on the table, Daly said: "No, there is not a proposal on the table."

Daly said there would be no further negotiations today and no future talks had been scheduled.

"Nothing is going on tonight," he said. "I don't know if I'm coming back tomorrow."

Former Devils forward Brendan Morrison, who sat in on the talks with Beckenbaugh, said: "It's good in sense that we're here having some dialogue with the mediator, but bad in a sensed that there is no progression."

Asked his feelings about where the process stood, Morrison said: "I think discouraged is a good word to use. Frustrated. It's bargaining. It has to be give and take. It just can't be give and it just can't be take from one side or the other.

"I never though the issues were as big as they were back in '04-05. Apparently I was wrong. I thought the gap would be closed much quicker but it hasn't come to fruition yet. We just have to keep working."

Morrison was surprised to hear that the NHL's last proposal was no longer on the table.

"I wasn't aware of that. When we left the meeting with the mediator we were told that package was still on the table," he said. "Then the mediator went to speak with the league. Obviously that's what they decided to do."

Morrison said the mediator was back and forth in both rooms "but there was just no progress."

He said the issues as the forefront for the players are the contracting issues because they've agreed to give up such a large share of the revenue.

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NHL lockout: Talks involving federal mediators could be one-day affair

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

Talks between the NHL and Players' Association have been held today at a federal mediation and conciliation service field office in Woodbridge, N.J., but at this point mediators may be involved just for one day.

The meetings appeared to end just after 5 p.m., with little or no progress reported. The players went to another room and met with Don and Steve Fehr. Suggestion from Nick Kypreos is that the league is still holding firm to a "take it or leave it" position.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, deputy commissioner Bill Daly and league attorney Bob Batterman met with NHLPA executive director Don Fehr, special counsel Steve Fehr and 13 players.

The Players' Association said Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers, Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Brendan Morrison, Douglas Murray and Daniel Winnik sat in on the talks.

At one point, federal mediators met with league officials while the players' group broke for lunch. No NHL owners took part in the talks today.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.13.2012 646338 New Jersey Devils

NHL doesn't budge on demands in mediation with NHLPA, Blackhawks' Jamal Mayers says 'take-it-or-leave-it' offers are 'extremely frustrating'

The parties were never in the same room, meeting separately with federal mediator Scot L. Beckenbaugh for six-and-a-half hours.

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

The NHL's position did not change at Wednesday's federal mediation in Iselin, N.J., so the lockout's trajectory did not either.

The league still wants a 'yes' or 'no' answer from the players' association to the package deal that it requested last week in Manhattan, with emphasis on player contract term limits and the length of the next collective bargaining agreement. The union's answer still is neither yes nor no. So that's why NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said there was "nothing new to report" on day 88 of the lockout.

"It's frustrating – beyond that, I don't know what to tell you," said Jamal Mayers of the Chicago Blackhawks, one of 13 players at Wednesday's six-and-a-half hour mediation. "There's not much you can do when it's take-it-or-leave-it. We'll just have to get back to the drawing board, it feels like. To think that we're that close but so far away is extremely frustrating."

The NHL and union were never in the same room, meeting separately with federal mediator Scot L. Beckenbaugh at an inconspicuous office building. Mediation may not resume Thursday, but hopefully it does, considering the NHL and union were no closer to compromise after Wednesday's process.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," players' union executive director Don Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made. Obviously we're going to stay in contact with the mediator tonight and in the morning to try and figure out what the next appropriate step is."

"We don't have a conclusion to the process," Daly said, leaving the door open for new developments on Thursday, however bleak.

The fact that meetings took place on Day 88 of the lockout was encouraging, since it marked the fourth straight week of major attempts by both parties to negotiate. That is significant because the early portion of this lockout was tainted by several droughts of any meaningful dialogue.

They met on Nov. 19 and 20 in New York, when the union made a comprehensive proposal the league rejected. They reconvened for mediation on Nov. 28 and 29, though that was unsuccessful. They met Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of last week before talks blew up. But they still got back together Wednesday.

The NHL did not believe it was close to a deal with the union last week, as Don Fehr contended in his Thursday press conference, because agreements on individual issues were contingent upon the union accepting the "package deal." Still, it's difficult to ignore that they indeed had reached agreement on several issues and had moved closer on most others.

To recap: Last week, the NHL and union had agreed to reset the revenue split from 57 players-43 owners to an even 50-50; to have the owners pay \$300 million to partially offset player losses due to that reset; and to maintain the current rules governing players' eligibility for unrestricted free agency (seven years or 27 years old) and salary arbitration (four years), instead of making the NHL's preferred changes (eight years/28 years old for free agency, five years for arbitration).

Meanwhile, they were closing in on agreement on other crucial issues: The NHL wanted a 10-year agreement, with a re-opener clause after year eight; the union countered with an eight-year deal, with a player opt-out option after six. The NHL wanted a five-year limit on player contracts, while players re-signing to teams could ink for up to seven years; the union moved off the position of keeping the status quo — unlimited contract lengths — and countered with an eight-year limit. The parties' ideas differed on how to address annual variability on player contracts, but they agreed it was an issue and did not seem far from resolution.

The union had to back off its late requests for compliance buyouts of player contracts and a limit on escrow payments, but that would not be the issue to lose a season over.

Of course, last Thursday, the league did not want to hear about how close they were to the players' association on specific issues. This was a "package deal" and Bettman even insisted all new items put on the table last week had been removed, including the entire 'make-whole' concept.

"(The owners) ... went back to the players and said we'll stay and we'll reengage if you agree to the three things that we say are important to us, which are the term of the CBA, the term-limits on player contracts — which is the hill we will die on — and the compliance issues," Daly said last Thursday. "And what we got today supremely missed the mark in all three

respects. So for the union to suggest that somehow we're close is cherry-picking."

The hope is that mediators can help the NHL and players' association agree on just how close to, or far from, a deal they actually are, and also to agree on the terms of their discussions: Is each meeting a discussion of an entire deal, or can agreement be reached on individual items without it being contingent on the acceptance of others?

Mediators have no power to impose a deal, only to make suggestions. The first attempt at mediation between the NHL and players' union failed after only two days on Nov. 28 and 29, but the union pushed for mediators to return last week. Though the NHL resisted then, the league acquiesced this week, it seemed, in return for the union agreeing to secrecy on the meeting's location.

The NHL wanted to keep Wednesday's meeting site a secret because of how talks blew up publicly on Thursday, when Fehr called a press conference to tell the media they were close to a deal — a proclamation the NHL considered false, disingenuous, unproductive spin. Talks had broken off publicly the second week of November.

More than anything, the mutual decision to resume mediation indicates both parties' heightened sense of urgency following Monday's cancellation games through Dec. 30. The NHL and NHL players' association now have only until early-to-mid-January to strike a new collective bargaining agreement before Bettman cancels the entire 2012-13 season.

The NHL's contingent Wednesday included deputy commissioner Bill Daly, commissioner Gary Bettman and attorney Bob Batterman. No owners attended after leaving last week's sessions in New York feeling disrespected and discouraged by the union's lack of response to a league proposal.

The NHL players' association sent executive director Don Fehr, special counsel Steve Fehr, its legal counsel, and 13 NHL players: Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers, Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Brendan Morrison, Douglas Murray and Daniel Winnik.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646339 New Jersey Devils

No face-to-face; no NHL progress

By MARK EVERSON

The closer they get, the harder each side claws for every little million in NHL Owners' Lockout III.

About all yesterday's six-hour mediated session between the league and the Players Association accomplished was to give the NHL protection against unfair labor practices claims, since it did agree to the meeting.

The New Jersey session, in which the sides did not meet face-to-face but had their positions handled by the federal intermediaries, failed to close any ground in the lockout, which has already cost the sport its games through Dec. 30.

The league remained firm with its take-it-or-leave-it stance on last week's offer, although deputy commissioner Bill Daly claimed there was no offer on the table, having been withdrawn after last week's breakdown.

The sides have at least both spoken of a 50-50 revenue split, down from a 57 percent players' share as the last CBA ended, although the timing and definitions of revenue have yet to be settled.

The biggest obstacles remain the length of the CBA, with the league asking for eight years, the players for six, each with two more optional years, and the league demanding a five-year limit on player contracts. In addition, the league is not willing to grant teams easy ways out of salary cap trouble that would result from such a cut in the players' share of revenue.

The players were left to, again, take or leave the league's plan, and they left it.

It was uncertain whether the sides would meet again today.

New York Post LOADED: 12.13.2012

646340 New York Islanders

NHL sides talk to mediators, not each other

MATT GILROY

Hometown: North Bellmore Teams: Rangers (2009-11), Long Island in the pros: NHL edition

After 6 1/2 hours of talks between the NHL, its players' association and a federal mediator, the sides are seemingly where they were a week ago when talks broke off: The NHL's last proposal is a take-it-or-leave-it offer and the players do not appear interested in taking it.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, deputy commissioner Bill Daly and counsel Bob Batterman traveled to Iselin, N.J., to a field office of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and, with mediator Scot Beckenbaugh acting as go-between, held talks with PA chief Don Fehr and a group of 13 players, including Islanders signee Brad Boyes, though Daly said Wednesday evening that the two sides were never in the same room.

Following the day-long process, the NHL had not moved off its proposal from last week: A pool of \$300 million towards the "make-whole" provision to fulfill existing contracts, a 10-year collective bargaining agreement with a mutual option to reopen after eight years and five-year contract term limits (seven years for a team's own player).

According to reports, the NHL did not put that offer back on the table, but the mediator may have presented it to the players as a hypothetical situation.

"It wasn't much of a decision," NHL veteran Brendan Morrison told reporters after the meetings ended.

Daly told reporters that the end of the day's talks did not mean a "conclusion to the process," but it was apparent the NHL had no further interest in utilizing mediators as of Wednesday.

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646341 NHL

NHL lockout: It makes sense that there will be hockey by January: Cox as the two sides try to end the lockout.

By Damien Cox Sports Columnist

An excerpt from Damien Cox's Spin on Sports blog:

The sensible conclusion to this NHL lockout was always obvious.

The league, given the situation in other sports and its own chronic financial problems, needed to get to a 50-50 split with all due speed.

The players, with their union's ugly history of the past seven years, needed to be able to give the owners that revenue split while being able to save face and feel as though they hadn't been defeated and had their association routed.

The biggest problem all along, then, has been the unwillingness of each side to fully grasp and accept the primary goals/needs of the other. The owners have communicated their objectives poorly to the players, who with a lot of bile already built up in their system, responded with unsurprising anger bordering on hatred. The players always knew they had to give, they just didn't want it to feel or look like they weren't putting up a fight.

Maybe each side finally has accepted the goals/needs of the other, or will soon, with the help of federal mediators starting today. Or, maybe this process was always going to lead to a mid-January conclusion, with some owners pushing for more than is necessary and some players and union officials living more for what happened before than what has to happen next.

No one can guarantee that either will happen, and the penchant for selfdestructive behaviour by both of these organizations is remarkable. But at this point, it seems to make sense that there will be NHL hockey by January.

Then, it will be time to switch over immediately, and aggressively, to three priorities.

1. Growing the pie. Going forward, each side will benefit equally if the game's revenues increase. Certainly, revenues were surging upwards until this lockout, which means that after taking a big hit this season, there is at least the possibility revenues can trend upwards again starting next fall.

We left the game with \$3.3 billion in revenues and the players getting 57 per cent of that, or about \$1.9 million. If the game is grown to \$5 billion, its \$2.5 billion each. Surely the mutual gain, the basic math, is all that matters now

2. Building a new relationship. Both the league and the PA really need to get off this treadmill of distrust and discord. It's one thing to disagree, quite another to constantly disparage the other side and try to undercut its leadership. Both the owners and union are guilty of these crimes, which is counter-productive to both.

The owners need to not only be willing to make players look good, but their union, as well. Ditto for the players. Constantly hating on Gary Bettman may make them feel better but reduces the overall respect level of the NHL.

If Don Fehr is to have a legacy in this game, it will be that he came, rebuilt the players' union and left behind a union that was able to forge not only a period of extended peace with the league, but one capable of moving beyond the battles of the past.

3. Fixing the game. Lost in all this squabbling is a product that, when we last saw it in the 2012 Stanley Cup playoffs, wasn't much to brag about. Too low-scoring. Too many blocked shots. Too dominated by the suffocating strategies of coaches. Plagued by controversies over head shots and head injuries.

This season, if it starts, will continue along those paths. There won't be time for new initiatives aimed at improving the game. That means next summer the league and players will need to aggressively attack the problems.

Part of the solution will lie in breathing new life into the competition committee. Conceived as a group of owners, GMs and players that would gather to each speak their minds on the good of the game, it has devolved into a outgrowth of the collective bargaining process in which the players and league representatives vote as blocs.

Not sure how that gets fixed, particularly with players seemingly under the belief that anyone who steps out of line with approved doctrine — hello, Roman Hamrlik — should be attacked and vilified. But it's the only way to finding the necessary imagination and creativity to make the league hum again.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.13.2012

646342 NHL

NHL lockout: If you're sick of it, here are TV alternatives: Mudhar

By Raju Mudhar Staff Reporter

Are you as sick as I am of the blow-by-blow coverage of the NHL lockout? In the wake of all the analysis, I'm left just confused.

It's hard to tell how far or close they might be, what with the constantly moving target of how far apart the two sides are money-wise or the battling over the make-whole proposition.

I don't care which owners are hawks or doves and am appalled at how far the NHL will go in declaring NHLPA head Donald Fehr to be public enemy No. 1 and an impediment to any deal.

Either way, I'm joining the sensible part of the population who basically wants to hear when a deal is done and a date when actual games resume. Until then, there are more than enough sports to keep any kind of fan busy. Here's a punter's guide on what to watch now.

1. The NFL, and more specifically the RedZone Channel: The NFL is king for so many reasons, and this weekend's action puts the playoff picture even more in flux, almost guaranteeing great finishes to the division races.

I'm generally not a big fan of the pay-to-watch era of sports that we are all moving toward, but the one exception that I've gladly paid for the past two years is the NFL's RedZone channel. This is the apotheosis of sports viewing.

For seven hours every Sunday, there are no commercials and the couch potato responsibility of flipping to the best game is left in the capable hands of host Scott Hanson and the RedZone crew. When there's more than one great thing happening, the screen splits two-three or four ways (the rarely seen, but glorious "quadbox"). From about 3 p.m. until 4:30, as the 1 o'clock choice ends — and usually with some crazy finishes — this is the most intense, joyful amazing sports watching any week of the football season. Other sports and channels have tried the game surfing concept, but RedZone has perfected it.

2. The NBA: Do we need to add the caveat "as long as it's not Raptors games?" The annual Christmas Day games are usually the NBA's comingout party for the casual fan, but there are already so many great stories this season, including James Harden and Jeremy Lin's move to Houston, the continued excellence of Oklahoma City, the resurgent Knicks and even the Lakers befuddlements are fun to watch.

Which is one more reason to chastise TSN for delaying last week's Heat-Knicks game for Gary Bettman's press conference. I will grant you that it was Bettman's most animated performance in years, and they clearly know what is important to the majority of their audience, but really, a presser that is more important than a real game, and a highly anticipated one at that? What about the audience that tuned in for the game? It would only happen in this country and for something hockey-related. And it shouldn't have.

- 3. Non-NHL Hockey: The question you must ask yourself is, are you a fan of the NHL or of watching hockey? Because if the answer is the latter, you have no excuse as the lack of NHL hockey has given more time and airspace to the OHL, AHL, WHL and even U.S. college hockey available across several different channels. Generally, there are competitive, fun games to watch, and with so many teams stuffing their young stars on their minor league teams, the calibre of hockey is improving. Better yet, take your money and go see one of these games live if you can.
- 4. The Grand Slam of Curling: While there are some who scoff, curling has excellent ratings across Canada, and one reason to watch this is that as one of Sportsnet's recent acquisitions, it will be interesting to watch how they handle it and build it up.
- 5. Soccer: I'll admit I'm an event soccer guy, other than an occasional TFC game live, but the Premiership is in full swing and Sportsnet has many games on across their various channels. Some are early, but I'm getting very used to saying "Another beer with breakfast, please."
- 6. ESPN's 30 for 30 Series: It's not a game, but it's still the best ongoing sports documentary series out there. It would be better if they had a home on the schedule as opposed to moving around to fill space on TSN, but on Saturday night at 7 p.m., it's You Don't Know Bo, which tells Bo Jackson's incredible story. I liked a lot about TSN's Engraved on a Nation series of CFL docs, and would love it if Canadian sports networks continued down that path, commissioning docs about all manner of our sport stories.
- 7. Watching what the Blue Jays will do next: With all their moves, the Jays have already won Toronto's barren winter of sports, and excitement for the upcoming season is at an all-time high. There's still likely moves to be made, but anything Jays-related is worth watching now. The team's winter caravan kicks off in a few weeks, trying to muster up even more excitement across the country and last year, the team posted up videos from its stops. It is literally cold comfort until Spring Training arrives.
- 8. Watching TSN tease out the World Juniors: The thing is that every sport and particular the other minor hockey leagues should take a page from TSN's book and begin to build up their events like the World Juniors, a tournament that is a ratings juggernaut here, but barely scratches the sports consciousness around the world. Sure, it's a team of all-stars, but TSN made people care about it here. Every minor incident through the selection will be big news, but like with the NHL, I'm looking forward to when the games actually start.

Toronto Star LOADED 12.13.2012

Oilers want to revive Edmonton arena talks

Paul Chiasson/The Canadian Press

EDMONTON — Officials representing Edmonton Oilers owner Daryl Katz say they were shocked when the city broke off talks on a new downtown arena and they would like negotiations restarted.

The Katz Group is appearing before city council to discuss the stalled \$450-million project.

Councillors voted in October to stop talking after the Katz Group refused to publicly explain its request for a \$6-million annual subsidy that was not part of the original agreement.

Senior executive John Karvellas says the Katz Group has dropped that demand.

He suggests instead any excess city tax revenue from the arena — beyond what has been forecast — go to the Oilers.

Karvellas also says it's up to the city to figure out where the \$100-million still needed for construction will come from.

The city has suggested that money will come from the province, but the province has so far said it will not fund the arena.

National Post LOADED: 12.13.2012

646344 NHL

NHL and union meet with mediators in New Jersey, but not with each other

Ira Podell, Associated Press

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

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.

Read more ...

NEW YORK — The latest round of NHL labour talks ended with the two sides in different rooms from each other.

The players' association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from \$211 million to \$300 million it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three nonnegotiable points. Instead, the players' association accepted the raise in funds, but then made counterproposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators asked the union on Wednesday, if that proposal was back in play, would the players take it or leave it?

"It wasn't much of a decision," said Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend Wednesday's talks. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

The offer wasn't actually resubmitted by the NHL. Neither side made any proposals Wednesday.

"There were discussions of the various issues involved and how far apart we are and where we go from here," players' association executive director Donald Fehr said. "I can't tell you that any progress was made."

All games through Dec. 30 have been cancelled, about 43 per cent of the season, along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic, and the All-Star game.

No new meetings have been scheduled.

Mediators rejoined the process Wednesday, at the request of the players' association, after they were unable to move the sides any closer to a deal during two days of talks last month.

Whether they will stay involved is uncertain.

"We did several different caucus meeting rooms, and really there's nothing new to report," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said Wednesday, the 88th day of the league's lockout. "We don't have a conclusion to the process."

After three straight days of talks between the sides ended last Thursday, Fehr began the first of his two news conferences by proclaiming he believed the sides had agreements on such issues as actual dollars, and then returned moments later to reveal the NHL rejected everything his side offered.

The 2004-05 season was lost completely before the players' association accepted a deal that included a salary cap for the first time. While no major philosophical issues such as that exist in these negotiations, the sides still don't seem be ready to come to an agreement.

"I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 04-05," Morrison said Wednesday. "Apparently, I was wrong."

A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January. Bettman said he wouldn't have a season shorter than that.

I never thought the issues were as big as they were back in 04-05. Apparently, I was wrong $\,$

The NHL wants to limit personal player contracts to five years, seven for a club to re-sign its own player, and has elevated the issue to the highest level of importance. The union countered with an offer of an eight-year maximum length with the variable in salary being no greater than a 25 per cent difference between the highest-paid year of the deal and the lowest.

The other sticking points the NHL demanded of the players are a 10-year term on the new agreement, with a mutual opt-out option after eight years, and no compliance buy-outs or caps on escrow in the transition phase to the new structure. The union presented an offer of an eight-year deal with a reopener after six.

No owners were with Bettman and Daly on the NHL side Wednesday, but the union had plenty of players in tow: Morrison, Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Douglas Murray, and Daniel Winnik.

National Post LOADED 12.13.2012

646345 NHL

Another power play for NHL owners as they test player resolve

Posted by: Jason Botchford

The waves of "cautious optimism" lapping up against the NHL vanished rather quickly, once again, when player representatives, including Brendan Morrison, left Wednesday's meetings.

After more than six hours with a mediator, Morrison used words like "discouraged," "frustrated" and "no progress" when talking to reporters in New Jersey.

Panic then ensued among hockey fans. But relax.

For starters, Morrison is not entirely accurate. There was progress if, as the players said, they were told, through a mediator, they could still have that proposal they were presented last week, the same one Gary Bettman pulled off the table with all his marbles and took home in his temper tantrum.

Of course, the NHL countered by saying it was only a "what if."

But in that "what if" scenario, it's still a take-it or leave-it offer, and that shouldn't surprise anyone.

There is a theory among the ownership group that if this proposal goes to a players' vote, most of the members in the NHLPA would check off the box which says "yes, we'll take it, give it to us, end the damn lockout."

That'd be some gamble if Bettman and Bill Daly continued to pursue it. But what's not on Bettman's side in testing the players' resolve is time. It's not likely anything is going to happen during Christmas week, leaving about 10 days or so to hammer out a resolution which would pave the way for a season that starts in early January.

And really, does anyone want to go much later than that?

The owners can continue to apply pressure to the players on this one, but they can't get around the cold truth that the sides have never been closer.

Here's the ideal world which many around the league are hoping for:

The owners actually negotiate this week. The sides reach a resolution. Training camp starts on Dec. 21 and games would begin on New Year's Eve.

One can dream.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646346 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators' Chris Neil takes high road over anti-NHLPA comments by Washington Capitals' Roman Hamrlik

By Don Brennan, Ottawa Sun

Chris Neil makes no secret of the fact he will seek retribution for on-ice actions against him or a teammate.

But for words he does not agree with during the lockout? That's just not his style.

"Everyone is entitled to their own opinion," said Neil — the Senators' alltime PIMs leader and one of the NHL's toughest individuals — after skating with the Carleton Ravens Wednesday. "The way our society is nowadays, it's freedom of speech, and everyone is entitled to their own opinion."

You'd think so, right? Except Flyers winger Scott Hartnell made it clear he lives in a different world by suggesting Roman Hamrlik will be wearing a bullseye when NHL resumes games because the Capitals defenceman had the nerve to express his concerns over the lack of urgency NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr showed in CBA negotiations last month.

Hartnell also insinuated Hamrlik will be hung out to dry by fellow Caps.

"I can't wait to see what (Hamrlik's) teammates do when guys go after him, " Hartnell told the Team 1200. "To sell the whole PA under the bus and to stick up for a guy like that is going to be tough."

To recap, Hamrlik said he was "disgusted" with the snail's pace of negotiations in November.

"We have to push Fehr to the wall to get the deal," he told a Czech reporter. "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."

When Hamrlik's feelings were echoed by Caps goalie Michal Neuvirth, Washington's Troy Brouwer so very dramatically threw in his two cents.

"For me, I think those guys selling us out, being selfish like that and making those comments ... how am I going to trust them as a teammate from now on?" said Brouwer. "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."

Neil, a staunch supporter of the union, says he's "pretty confident" the majority of players are 100% behind Fehr. He also proved he's a better teammate than both Hartnell and Brouwer.

"Soon as you put that jersey on, you're going out and playing for your team, " said Neil. "His teammates are going to stick up for him. You don't have to like everyone on your team, but you've got to get along with everyone. That's (part of) having a successful team. I think at the end of the day, when you go out, you're going out and playing for the same thing as your teammates. That's important. They're going to have his back. That's what hockey players are all about."

Neil didn't deny he can hold a grudge.

"If something happens during a game, you take note," he said. "You might not get him that game, but you might catch him with his head down the next game. If someone catches me with my head down, that's my own fault. But if they catch Alfie (Daniel Alfredsson) with his head down, that's when you take notes, put it in the back of your mind. And next game, if you see him out there and you can do something about it at the time, do it. If not, wait for the opportunity.

"I don't agree with what Hamrlik said, but it is what it is. He's come out and said that. I just think it prolongs the process."

Meanwhile, the 38-year-old Hamrlik is standing by his words. Earlier this week, he insisted he has talked with players who totally understand his situation.

"Maybe I regret I said it at the wrong time, a really crucial time," Hamrlik told nextsportstar.com. "Maybe I should have said it earlier. Maybe I should have called Don (Fehr) on the phone and told him, but I'm not taking anything back. I don't have too many years left. As an older guy, I just want to play hockey."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.13.2012 646347 Philadelphia Flyers

Players reject NHL proposal, prolonging lockout

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, December 13, 2012, 2:16 AM

Same NHL offer. Same response by the players' union: no thanks.

The NHL Players' Association on Wednesday rejected a take-it-or-leave-it offer from the NHL, prolonging the labor dispute.

"They left it for us to make a decision to see basically if we want to accept the proposal that was presented to us last week," free-agent forward Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend the meetings in Iselin, N.J., told the Record of Bergen County. "So it wasn't much of a decision."

Last Thursday, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman angrily took the league's offers off the bargaining table after the players rejected them. On Wednesday, he put the offers back on the table.

It was the first time the two sides met since negotiations abruptly ended last Thursday.

The sides - which did not include any owners - were in separate rooms on Wednesday, and Scot Beckenbaugh, a federal mediator, went back and forth with the parties and tried to find some common ground.

No date was set for the parties to meet again.

The players weren't ready to accept the NHL's proposal, which included a 50/50 split of hockey-related revenue, \$300 million toward guaranteeing salaries, a 10-year collective bargaining agreement, a maximum of five years on player contracts, and compliance issues.

Wednesday was the 88th day of the lockout, and the sides are close on several major issues. But they figure to battle over "transition" issues - such as setting the teams' maximum salary cap, and whether to include amnesty buyouts this season.

Bettman said teams must play a 48-game season to preserve the league's integrity. Assuming the regular season still ended April 13, the first games would have to be played by about Jan. 5 to have at least a 48-game season.

For that to happen, a deal would have to be in place by Christmas, giving players time to return from Europe and have a short training camp.

Breakaways. The Comcast Network will televise five Adirondack Phantoms games, starting with a 7 p.m. game on Saturday against the Manchester Monarchs. . . . Ed Snider, chairman of the Flyers' parent company, Comcast-Specator, and the company's president, Peter Luukko, were named 43d in Street and Smith's Sports Business Journal's list of the most influential people in sports business.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646348 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL, players still seeking deal

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

Last week, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman angrily took all of the league's offers off the bargaining table.

On Wednesday, he put them back on it, according to Sportsnet of Canada.

Still, the NHL and the players' union could not reach an agreement and resolve their labor dispute.

It was the first time they met since negotiations abruptly ended last Thursday

The players aren't ready to accept the NHL's take-it-or-leave it proposal, which includes a 10-year CBA, a maximum of five years on player contracts (with no more than a 5% variance each year) and compliance increase.

Bill Daly, the NHL's deputy commissioner, told reporters the sides were in separate rooms all day, and that the players were working on something "right now."

Federal mediators met with both sides during the 6 1/2 hours of meetings in Iselin, N.J.

Wednesday was the 88th day of the lockout, and the sides are close on several major issues. But they must find common ground on "transition" issues _ such as setting the teams' maximum salary cap, and whether to include an amnesty buyout this season.

Bettman said teams must play a 48-game season to preserve the league's integrity. Assuming the regular season still ended on April 13, the first games would have to be played by around Jan. 5 in order to have at least a 48-game season.

For that to happen, a deal would have to be in place by Christmas, thus giving players time to return from Europe and have a short training camp.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.13.2012

646349 Philadelphia Flyers

Hockey fans fed up with ongoing NHL lockout

DAN GELSTON

Sitting in a hockey locker room, Steve Chase became the latest die-hard fan fed up with the NHL lockout.

Living in Los Angeles, Chase believed the league had squandered all the goodwill built in the area after the Kings won the Stanley Cup. His weekly pickup games with friends became his only taste of the sport he loved because of the ongoing labor strife that has dragged on for months.

So he took a poll of his buddies, then took a pledge:

"We're not coming back."

Not for good. Just not after the lockout is settled, not for a while.

Chase started the grass roots "Just Drop It" campaign that encourages fans to boycott one NHL game for every game canceled after Dec. 21st. No tickets, no TV, no merchandise -- not a minute or a penny spent on the league, punishment for what he believed are continued abuses of loyalty on their fan base.

He made a video and started a Facebook page, urging fans to click the "like" button and join the cause. More than 11,000 angry fans have joined since the weekend, a puck drop in the circle compared to the millions of fans who attend games, but the latest small sign fans won't again be easily won back

"People are trying to crush the NHL," Chase said. "That's not our goal. Our goal is just to get hockey back. Hopefully somebody, somewhere cares about this and decides, `Guys, we've got to get back and talk.' The fans are right.

"They're fighting over our money."

The days of letter writing and 30-second phone calls to sports radio stations have ballooned to steady streams of hashtags, Facebook posts and homemade videos from fans who just want to come in from the cold of this labor battle and watch their slap shots and saves. They are exasperated over a work stoppage with no end in sight and little regard for the fans.

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby understood why fans are upset over the third lockout in Commissioner Gary Bettman's 20-year tenure.

"I don't blame anyone for being frustrated with this process," Crosby said. "Everyone's got to be frustrated with the way this has gone. It's pretty easy for everyone involved to feel that way."

Kind of like they sing in a song about union executive director Donald Fehr's old sport, some fans vow it's one, two, three lockouts and they're out.

"I wouldn't blame them if they did that by any stretch," Penguins forward Craig Adams said, "but I can't predict that."

It's actually pretty easy to call this shot.

For all the angry tweets, texts, threats and organized campaigns, fans will still pick up the remote and print out tickets as soon as the strife ends.

They always do. In every sport. Remember 1994? After the World Series was wiped out, baseball loyalists vowed never to return to the old ball game. Fueled by super-sized sluggers and retro ballparks, attendance topped 60 million in 1996, 70 million in 1998 and soared to 79,503,175 in 2007

The NHL, of course, can't match those numbers. But the story arc is still the same. The NHL drew 20,854,169 fans when the sport returned in 2005-06 - 497,970 more than the total in 2003-04, the season before the lockout.

The NHL saw an attendance uptick each of the next three seasons and totaled a record 21,468,121 fans in 2011-12.

Fans are filling stadiums from A (Air Canada) to X (Xcel Energy) and most geographic points in between. If there are fans still holding out over the lost season and refusing to step foot inside an NHL arena, they're at least throwing on their oversized Winter Classic sweaters and watching from home.

The 2004 Stanley Cup finals between the Tampa Bay Lightning and Calgary Flames averaged 3.286 million viewers on ABC/ESPN, the Nielsen company said. Those numbers actually dipped in 2006 and 2007 when Carolina and Anaheim, two nontraditional hockey markets, won the Cup.

When hockey-mad cities like Pittsburgh, Detroit, Philadelphia and Chicago all reached the finals, though, the ratings soared. The Blackhawks-Flyers

series in 2010 on NBC/Versus averaged 5.167 million viewers, the highest for the finals since 2002, Nielsen said.

The NHL is coming off its sixth consecutive year of record revenue, with a projection of more than \$3.2 billion by the end of the 2012 Stanley Cup playoffs, the league said.

Don't forget, the NHL has a \$2 billion, 10-year deal with NBC Sports Group through the 2020-21 season.

"Our fan support coming back last time was outstanding and we were probably a little bit surprised to see how good it was," Adams said. "That speaks to how much the fans love the game."

The NHL clearly caught some breaks coming out of the last lockout.

The league marketed its comeback around rising stars like Crosby and Washington's Alex Ovechkin. They added fan-friendly shootouts and the New Year's Day Winter Classic. The league made the two-line pass legal to help bust up the neutral-zone trap and created chic commercials to appeal more toward casual fans.

This time -- whenever the lockout ends -- the league might be all out of tricks. They'll need to dig. And it could take years to recover from the wreckage.

Some teams are trying to keep their brand alive among an increasingly uninterested public. The Flyers aired classic games and brought back former stars for autograph signings at a sports bar in the same complex as the Wells Fargo Center.

Gerry Helper, special assistant to the president and senior vice president for the Nashville Predators, said the team enjoyed their best season ticket renewal year in franchise history this past offseason.

The Predators have stayed aggressive in developing benefits packages for season ticketholders during the work stoppage. They organized "Preds Pride Day" activities and something called a "Smashmob" for a youth hockey game last month where they brought their public address announcer and mascot, and created a Predators' game-like atmosphere. Helper wrote in an email to The AP the Predators have stayed in touch with season ticket holders via email and phone.

Not every Predators fan feels appreciated. Tom Begley, of Franklin, Tenn., canceled the two season tickets he has held since Day 1 of the franchise. He also estimated approximately 1,000 people like himself are season-ticket holders from the first day. He said the team has done plenty of events for all season-ticket holders, but nothing special for that select group.

"I got not even a phone call from the Predators just to say, `Look we know you're a loyal die-hard season-ticket holder from Day 1. Why don't you come down and do something at the arena?" he said. "Hey, if I feel like it down the line and I want to buy tickets again I can do it. Right now, I don't know. I'm not convinced that hockey here in Nashville is going to be viable long-term. I am scared to death of what Donald Fehr is doing to the game and it's a shame. It really is."

In Pennsylvania, the government is getting involved in the messy dispute.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Bob Casey on Wednesday urged the U.S. Small Business Administration to provide additional assistance to Pittsburgh and Philadelphia businesses that have been adversely affected by the lockout. Casey claimed small business in Pittsburgh are losing nearly half of the \$2.1 million in revenue generated for each Penguins home game. He wrote Philadelphia is losing \$1 million in revenue from each lost home game.

All the bluster of a boycott is easier tweeted than done. Fans can't quit Sid the Kid, Ovi, Big Z, The Warden, Phil the Thrill and The Doaner.

On Opening Night in January 2013 or October 2013 or November 2015, whenever, the teams will be back ready for the first faceoff.

So will the fans.

At least some of them.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.13.2012

646350 Philadelphia Flyers

'No progress' made in NHL labor talks

Tim Panaccio Follow @TPanotchCSN

The mediator was back. The owners weren't.

Different day, same story, albeit, a new location -- North Jersey.

"No progress," said NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly to a reporter after more than six hours of meetings.

Echoed NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr hours later, "I can't tell you any progress was made."

Neither side announced a schedule for further talks.

Wednesday's negotiations were held at an undisclosed location -- later identified as the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service field office in Woodbridge, N.J.

The lockout is now 88 days old. The league and union had not met since last Thursday's disastrous conclusion of talks in New York City.

Discussions began around 11 a.m. with a late afternoon break and ended shortly after 4 p.m. Scot Beckenbaugh was the mediator.

Player rep Brendan Morrison said Beckenbaugh told the union the league's offer from last Thursday was back on the table, but the union had to agree to full compliance.

Daly, in an email to CSNPhilly.com, disputed that with a technicality.

"Nothing is on the table from either side," he told us. "More in the way of what if' discussions with the mediator."

Clearly, at this point, the NHL is not going to change its "final" offer.

If the NHL won't negotiate off its last offer, then Commissioner Gary Bettman's only other play is to announce a "drop dead" date when the season will be cancelled.

Yet, that works into's Fehr's strategy of getting the owners to sweeten the pot. Every time the NHL puts a date out there, Fehr prolongs it. Fehr now has to decide when Bettman is finished bluffing and whether the "end game" is within reach.

Recall, the players feel they need a 10-day training camp before play begins, and January is now the earliest date.

The two sides are close or in agreement on most of the core economic issues. Yet, the NHL wants total compliance on:

- · Accept a 10-year CBA
- Accept five-year term lengths on player contracts (seven years on resigning players)
- · Accept five percent annual variance on salaries within those contracts.

The union, last Thursday, countered with:

- Eight-year CBA with a re-opener at six years
- Eight years on individual player contract length
- 25 percent annual variance on salaries from the first year to the last year of a deal.

There are also several complicated "transitional" issues that are far from being agreed upon, including whether teams can get "amnesty" to lose contracts between this year and next year on the CBA to get within salary cap compliance.

On Wednesday, Bettman and Daly represented the league, along with counsel Bob Batterman from Proskauer Rose.

Fehr and his brother, Steve, who is special counsel, represented the NHLPA along with the following players: Craig Adams, Adrian Aucoin, Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Jamal Mayers Andy McDonald, Steve Montador, Brendan Morrison, Douglas Murray and Daniel Winnik.

Right now, a shortened season would be a 50- to 56-game schedule starting Jan. 1 "if" a new CBA was forged no later than Dec. 30.

After that, the best the NHL could do is likely 48 games.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.13.2012

646351 Pittsburgh Penguins

Starkey: Holiday spirits crushed by NHL

By Joe Starkey

It's a hockey blight in Pittsburgh.

It is Monday, Dec. 10, and the Winnipeg Jets are supposed to play the Penguins at Consol Energy Center — you know, the building that sucked \$47.6 million from taxpayer pockets on the understanding that at least 41 hockey games per year would pump cash back into the local economy.

The mission is to take my usual game-day walk to the arena and assess the lockout's collateral damage along the way. It is 6:15 p.m. — rainy, bitter and nearly barren on a night that would normally be bustling with eager Penguins fans.

Too bad player union chief Donald Fehr and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman couldn't have come along to spread some holiday cheer. Shoot, all the players and owners should be here. We could have gone caroling ...

Silent night

Our side's right

We can't split uuuup 3 billion bucks

You'll just have to waaait for dropping pucks

Weep in heavenly peace

While we conceive the best way to fleece (you)

Did somebody say weep? Here I am at the Souper Bowl, catty-corner from the Consol, where manager Jess Santavy, 28, wonders how she'll keep up with the mortgage on her new South Side home.

Santavy is serving all of six customers tonight. How would it be different on a hockey night?

"Do you want to see me cry?" she said.

On a hockey night, more than 300 patrons and 25 employees would pack this place from wall to wall.

Tonight, it's just Santavy and the cook.

"I've lost about 30 percent of my income," she said. "I'd hate to have to leave, but a lot of people here are talking about getting second jobs, if not new jobs altogether."

I wonder, what would she tell Bettman if he walked in?

"I hope I'd be wearing my T-shirt that says, 'Bettman's a Jagoff,' " she said. "But I know neither side cares about us."

Souper Bowl will close at 9 p.m., five hours earlier than game nights.

A slap shot away, at Café Fifth Avenue, bartender Elyssa Leff is counting money near the end of her shift. A place that would be turning away customers if the Jets were in town has just one right now.

"Actually, that's my husband," Leff says.

Standing under larger-than-life posters of Sidney Crosby and Marc-Andre Fleury, Leff, 45, tells me she might take home \$150 on a game night. She will pocket a fraction of that tonight. Mother to a 14-year-old, she estimates her income has been cut by two-thirds.

Leff's first thought when she heard games were canceled through Dec. 30?

"There goes Christmas," she said.

She isn't sure what to make of the latest negotiations that began Wednesday, hoping only that some semblance of a season can be salvaged.

At TGI Friday's, attached to the arena, manager Brian Dunkle tells me there would be a 11/2-hour wait on a hockey night, and he would be overseeing 30-some workers.

There is no wait tonight. Just lots of empty tables. Eight employees clocked in

Meanwhile, at Mitchell's on Third and Ross, Jim Mitchell figures his joint, the oldest restaurant in Pittsburgh, would have been filled hours ago. It would do a brisk postgame business, too.

Tonight, there's ample space and quiet for a chat.

"I can't even begin to tell you how much (the lockout) has cost us," Mitchell said.

Another popular pregame stop is Sammy's Famous Corned Beef on Forbes, which looks festively inviting with its fogged-up, tinsel-lined windows framed by holiday lighting.

Must be a party inside.

Or not. The entire crowd could be reduced to a bad movie title: "Four Men and a Bar."

One of them is Donovan Greenway, 34, a partial season-ticket holder from Ohio Township.

"I'm not renewing," Greenway said. "I'm not going back."

He's one of the rare exceptions, of course. We all know hockey fans are the most loyal of all.

Outside the arena, two Duquesne Light trucks clog the street. Workers are popping open manhole covers, looking for the cause of a power outage.

What would they do if a hockey game were going on?

"Well," a worker tells me, "we'd probably have to wait."

And so we shall.

Happy holidays, NHL.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.13.2012

646352 Pittsburgh Penguins

NHL labor talks remain stalled

By Josh Yohe

The NHL and Players' Association finally agreed on something Wednesday night: No progress has been made in labor negotiations.

Although league and union members were in the same New Jersey building, the primary figures from each side never met.

Both sides dealt with federal mediators for almost seven hours in what proved to be another fruitless gathering. The sides are expected to speak with mediators again Thursday, though it remains unknown when they will meet again.

Wednesday marked Day 88 of the lockout. NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly was visibly agitated.

"I don't know if I'm coming back tomorrow," he said. "I don't have any more to say."

The split of revenue between the league and players — the biggest issue when the lockout was triggered Sept. 15 — mostly has been decided.

However, the sides still are bickering over topics such as contract length and the length of a new CBA.

Fehr, looking unfazed, simply shrugged when asked for specifics.

"All I'm going to say is that there wasn't any change in position," he said.

Fehr is pushing for more dialogue but is unsure what the rest of the week will offer. He and commissioner Gary Bettman are aware that a deadline for an agreement is fast approaching if canceling the season is to be avoided.

"It's pretty hard to make an agreement if you aren't meeting," Fehr said.

Penguins union representative Craig Adams was one of a handful of players to attend the meetings. Sidney Crosby, who attended meetings last week, said recently he was finished appearing at negotiations.

No owners were present; Bettman and Daly represented the league.

"We have nothing new to report," Daly said.

It is believed Bettman will not allow a season with fewer than 48 games to take place. To accomplish that, the season will have to start in mid-January.

Fehr said the only way legitimate negotiations will resume is with "a joint belief that there is a reasonable chance we can accomplish something."

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.13.2012

646353 Pittsburgh Penguins

NHL lockout: Talks back on, but go for naught

By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The NHL's labor talks got going again Wednesday, but that doesn't mean they went anywhere.

Federal mediator Scot Beckenbaugh met with -- and shuttled between -- league officials and representatives of the NHL Players' Association in Iselin, N.J., for 6 1/2 hours, but his efforts yielded no positive movement.

"It's good, in the sense we're here," longtime NHL center Brendan Morrison told reporters at the site of the meeting. "And bad in the sense there is no progress."

There was no immediate word on when the sides will meet again or whether there will be further mediation.

Although NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told media members that there was not a proposal on the table, Morrison said Beckenbaugh suggested to the NHLPA that the offer the league extended a week ago -- then pulled when talks broke off -- was in play.

It's more likely, however, that the mediator was dealing in a hypothetical situation.

Whatever the case, it didn't matter.

The NHLPA tried to revise some of the terms put forth in that offer a week ago, leading to the abrupt end of talks, and obviously wasn't inclined to accept it six days later, regardless of whether it was officially available.

"It wasn't much of a decision," Morrison told the reporters.

Thirteen players, one of them Penguins player representative Craig Adams, took part Wednesday. No owners were involved.

NHL players have been locked out since Sept. 16 while the sides have been unable to work out the details of a new collective bargaining agreement.

The notion of an 82-game regular season in 2012-13 passed long ago. If an agreement is reached in time to save any portion of the season, it will be a severely scaled-back one.

"I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet," Morrison said.

"So we have to keep working."

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.13.2012

646354 Pittsburgh Penguins

National Hockey League lockout hurting Uptown merchants, workers

By Diana Nelson Jones and Jonathan D. Silver / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A great day for hockey is a great day for business on Fifth Avenue, Uptown -- wall-to-wall at the Souper Bowl, packed to the gills at Shale's Cafe. But three months into the National Hockey League lockout, the hurt is

deepening for merchants who depend on revenue from events at the Consol Energy Center.

"This is killing us," a dejected Rachel Brown, manager of Cafe Fifth Avenue, said Tuesday evening as she looked out on a near-empty bar a block from Consol. "Right about now I'm nine grand [in earnings] behind where I was at last year."

It was hoped that Tuesday night's West Virginia University-Duquesne University basketball game and tonight's Wiz Khalifa concert would provide a welcomed uptick in a landscape that will have been devoid of 36 hockey games by the end of this month.

But a visit to three establishments within a block of the arena around tip-off time at 7:05 p.m. showed that the most noise and excitement was being drummed up by the sports anchors on ESPN who were broadcasting to mostly empty stools.

A total of perhaps two dozen patrons were seated in Cafe Fifth Avenue, the Souper Bowl and Shale's -- far fewer than a typical hockey night in Pittsburgh.

"You can see what it's doing for us," Ms. Brown said as she indicated her paltry business. When the Penguins are playing, "both floors would be packed solid. The bar is eight deep."

"We're still dealing with losses from the last lockout" in 2004-05, said Carly Sypherd, a member of the family that owns the Souper Bowl. "Bills don't stop even if hockey does."

When hockey is in full swing the Souper Bowl has both floors open and 11 servers. Tuesday night only the upstairs was in swing with three servers.

"I bought a house last year, so that's getting difficult. I need new tires for my car. It's getting scary," said Ms. Sypherd, standing under a banner welcoming people to "Penguins Country."

"I've never had to plan down to the dollar," she continued. "I've always had cash on hand. Now I'm pinching my pennies to pay my bills."

The Small Business Administration recognizes the impact and will be initiating free counseling services to businesses in 23 cities that pay bills and staff largely on revenue from ice hockey crowds.

Carl Knoblock, district director of the Western Pennsylvania Small Business Administration, said the SBA is planning a January event in conjunction with the small business development centers at the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University to advise retailers of strategies to diversify their market

"We will be going out to show people how to think differently," Mr. Knoblock said. "We tend to get comfortable with our routines when everything is normal but when we get these unpredicted abnormals like a strike or if the Steelers don't make the playoffs, those are revenue sources restaurant owners and retail are counting on.

"There are other markets. Lots of times people just don't look at them because they've been busy."

In the meantime, the Small Business Development Center at Pitt is working with some businesses that are affected by the lockout, said its director, Ray Vargo.

Lynne Glover, communications director at VisitPittsburgh, said the revenue losses to tourism and regular businesses due to the lockout are an estimated \$2.2 million for each game not played.

"I live and die based on events," said Terry O'Brien, owner of Shale's Cafe, an 80-year-old bar on Fifth Avenue a block from the arena. "I've probably lost 70 percent of my business since the lockout."

Pointing toward the arena, Mr. O'Brien said, "A substantial part of my business is from people who work over there. They'd come after the games. I know they're hurting, too."

Shale's bartender Brock Wilson, who was serving only two women after the pre-game rush of business, said usually there are between 150 and 200 customers before a hockey game. Tuesday night, Mr. Wilson estimated, only about 50 came into the bar before the basketball game.

Representatives from AEG Facilities, the company that manages the arena, could not be reached to comment on the toll the lockout has taken among staff that work at the arena.

"My income's one-third what it used to be," said Terrie Rihn, a cashier at Milano, a restaurant and bar nearby. "All the businesses around us are hurting. I saw two ladies who work at the arena who I hadn't seen in a long time. They've been laid off but were called back" for Tuesday's and tonight's events.

Part-time waitresses who used to work three or four days at the Souper Bowl have been cut to one, Ms. Sypherd said.

"We've had to lay off two people, and we've lost a lot of part-time Duquesne students. The hockey crowd is our mainstay, probably 80 percent of our business. We have a decent lunch crowd, but it doesn't compare."

"This has hurt an awful lot," Ms. Rihn said. "I told my kids it's going to be a lean Christmas."

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.13.2012

646355 San Jose Sharks

Purdy: NHL needs to stop bickering and get back to work

By Mark Purdy

SAN JOSE -- Enough, guys. It's time.

Yes, you guys. The owners and players of the National Hockey League. You have wasted your customers' patience long enough. Christmas is nigh. You need to get this lockout settled.

It's true that the Kabuki theater of the negotiations -- with all the blustering and posturing -- has been mildly entertaining. But that's only because most of us figured they would be concluded by now and that no league in any sport would be stupid enough to risk canceling two entire seasons within a span of nine years.

Yet here we are. The two sides are still talking, at least. And according to the Twitter feed of the NHLPA, Douglas Murray of the Sharks was among the players'

FILE - In this file photo taken Dec. 6, 2012, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, right, and deputy commissioner Bill Daly speak to reporters in New York. The NHL eliminated 16 more days from the regular-season schedule Monday, Dec. 10, 2012, and if a deal with the players' association isn't reached soon the whole season could be lost. The league wiped out all games through Dec. 30 in its latest round of cancellations. Negotiations between the league and the players' association broke off last week, but Daly said Sunday the sides are trying to restart talks this week. JpgMary Altaffer, file) (Mary Altaffer)

delegation Wednesday at a New Jersey mediation office. This conjured up the delightful vision of Murray going into the corner and slamming a hip check into NHL commissioner Gary Bettman.

Alas, that's not what occurred. The two negotiating parties were never in the same room Wednesday. They each met with mediators in separate sessions, trying to assemble terms that would be acceptable for all. But at day's end, nothing was settled. And it was unclear if there would be another session Thursday -- or any other day.

Enough. It's time.

Meanwhile, as the squabbling continued back east, there was a fascinating development back here in the Bay Area. The people at HP Pavilion announced that all 17,562 tickets had been distributed

for next Monday's minor league hockey game there between the San Francisco Bulls and the Stockton Thunder. The tickets were free to those who applied for them. But on Wednesday afternoon, some of those "free" tickets were being scalped for up to \$40 each on Craigslist.

Not sure what that means. It probably means that hockey fans, per their reputation, are the most dedicated and passionate (some would say crazed and sick) fans in North America. It probably means they are desperate to watch a game in San Jose, any game. It probably means that when/if the NHL season begins, those fans will return. They are the sports version of Deadheads, ready to show up for the next tour whenever and wherever.

But to really thrive, the NHL needs more than the Deadheads/puckheads. It needs the casual fans who show up for a game or two per season or who

might watch some games on television. If another season is scrubbed, those are the fans who will find other things to do and won't come back quickly.

Enough, guys. It's time.

Normally, the stance here toward all the labor-management negotiations in major league sports has been of the heck-with-both-sides variety. It can give you a headache if you really dig into the arcane details of offers and counteroffers. Why bother? The best strategy is to ignore the ups and downs, wait out the feuding little kids and tell them to wake us up when they get a deal.

But such a view is harder to adopt this time -- if only because last week, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly issued perhaps the most over-the-top statement in sports contract bargaining history.

At a media session podium after the breakup of one players-vs.-league session and trying to explain where the NHL stood, Daly proclaimed: "This is the hill we will die on." He was referring to the owners' intractable stance on three issues -- term limits on player contracts, a 10-year labor agreement (with an NHLPA option to reopen after eight years) and the transition terms from the expired agreement to the next one regarding buyouts of current contracts and other matters.

The quote was ridiculous on multiple levels. Besides being disrespectful to, you know, soldiers of all nations who actually did die on hills, Daly's language was indicative of how deluded hockey owners are about their business' place in the universe. Even here in Northern California, where Sharks fans are as loyal as any in the league, most of them approach the games as an excellent night of competitive entertainment rather than a religious pilgrimage.

Enough, guys. It's time.

The players, on the other hand, have been honest about wanting the best deal possible, without drawing preposterous battlefield analogies into the picture. They know the owners have them over a barrel because the owners control the arenas and the schedule. These negotiations have been about the players trying to hold onto as much of their current deal as possible, not about them wanting more.

One of Canada's most respected sports columnists, Eric Duhatschek of the national Globe and Mail, did some calculating last week. He figured out that basically, this fight is about 3-12 percent of the workforce. The owners (and the Sharks are among the franchises most firm about this) want to limit contract terms to five seasons. About 90 players currently have deals longer than that. The union wants that contract term limit to be eight seasons. About 22 players have deals longer than that.

There are 750 players in the league. Can it really be that impossible to bridge a gap that doesn't even involve the vast majority of the employees? It's not too late to play a fairly meaningful schedule. In 1994-95, when yet another lockout was settled in midwinter, the season began in mid-January and lasted 48 games.

Or perhaps stupidity and hill-dying will conquer all. For the last seven years, my half-serious, half-joking contention has been that the Sharks were hurt worse than any other team by the 2004-05 lost lockout season because that was going to be their Stanley Cup destiny. Someone was supposed to win it that year. Why not the Sharks? They had reached the conference finals the previous season. We'll never know where the 2005 championship banner was supposed to hang. It's a ghost banner. Does the NHL want another one?

Enough, guys. It's time.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646356 San Jose Sharks

Hockey fans snap up all free tickets for Monday night's game at HP Pavilion

By David Pollak

SAN JOSE -- All 17,562 free tickets to Monday night's minor-league hockey game at HP Pavilion between the San Francisco Bulls and the Stockton Thunder are now in the hands of fans or ticket brokers.

Sharks executive vice-president for business operations Malcolm Bordelon reported on Twitter that the final 3,400 seats were snapped up in less than five minutes after they were made available Wednesday to the general public. The other tickets previously were distributed to Sharks and Bulls season-ticket holders.

The Bulls, a member of the East Coast Hockey League, are a Sharks' affiliate playing their inaugural season at the Cow Palace. The team has been carrying four San Jose prospects on its roster with Sharks forward Ryane Clowe also serving as an assistant coach.

Some of the free tickets immediately turned up for online sale at Craigslist and eBay. Initial prices were anywhere from \$1 each to a set of four for \$449, though one agency removed its high-priced eBay listings later in the day.

This is the second minor-league game moved to San Jose during an NHL lockout. On Nov. 9, 2004, some 11,784 fans turned out for an AHL game between the Edmonton Road Runners and the Cleveland Barons, then San Jose's top development team. Some of those seats cost \$5 with proceeds going to the Sharks Foundation.

Parking on arena lots for Monday night's game also is free.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646357 San Jose Sharks

Mercury News editorial: Fans and San Jose businesses need hockey back

Mercury News Editorial

The madness of the National Hockey League lockout, now in its third month, has gone on long enough. It's time to play hockey. And, by the way, to rescue the struggling restaurants and other businesses in downtown San Jose that rely on Sharks traffic to prosper.

Federal mediators are back, but that doesn't mean much. They have a spotty record at best working with professional sports leagues. And fans are sick of watching millionaire athletes argue with billionaire owners over money at the expense of the people who help make them rich.

It's all looking like a bad rerun. Legitimate disagreement over contract terms and division of revenue has turned into a battle of egos between NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and NHL players representative Donald Fehr. The search for a legitimate bargain has become a win-at-all-costs blood sport.

Last week, Fehr called a news conference to announce that a deal was "in sight." Insiders say the statements caused Bettman to throw a tantrum. Fehr had to hurriedly call a second news conference to back away from the first one. It's a mess.

The NHL has canceled games through the end of December, but there is thought that an agreement in the next few days could salvage a 48-game season -- roughly 59 percent of a normal one -- and all of the playoffs. That is the best scenario hockey fans and local economies like San Jose's can expect. But cancellation of the entire season is a real threat. The NHL,

with Bettman at the helm, did just that in 2005, and there's better than a 50-50 chance it will happen again. It's doubtful that the NHL would try to play a season starting any later than January. It's now or never.

This lockout hurts many more people than just the players, the owners or even the fans. People who make part of their living because of the NHL do not have strike funds or mounds of cash on which to rely. And it's not just restaurants, sports bars and other peripheral businesses whose employees suffer. It's hockey and arena employees, security and sales people, ushers -- most of them people making modest incomes in the best of times. They are at the mercy of the rich folks at the top of the sports employment pyramid.

The only encouraging aspect of the current negotiation is that it's taking place at an "undisclosed location" away from the media glare. Sometimes, to be productive, negotiators have to take a timeout from public pontificating. Whatever it takes to bring sanity back to the table, we're for it.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 12.13.2012

646358 St Louis Blues

NHL negotiations could affect Pietrangelo's next contract

By Jeremy Rutherford

Alex Pietrangelo recently purchased his first home, in St. Louis, and added a new roommate, a dog named "Molly" he picked up at a local animal shelter. After beginning his career with the Blues living out of a suitcase, the defenseman is finally settling into his surroundings.

How long Pietrangelo can plan on his next contract keeping him here will depend on the NHL's collective bargaining negotiations, which aren't exactly going well.

Before the expiration of the old agreement Sept. 15, there was no limit on the length of a player's contract. But one of the NHL's sticking points in a new deal is the introduction of a five-year maximum length on individual contracts, with the option of seven years for players re-signing with their current teams.

The league is also seeking a maximum five percent variance in salary year to year, thus eliminating the "back-diving" contracts created by teams to circumvent the salary cap.

The union countered with an eight-year maximum term and 25 percent variance, but the league didn't budge last week, with the NHL's deputy commissioner, Bill Daly, calling the contract issues "the hill we will die on."

"It could impact me if there is a limit on those," Pietrangelo, 22, said. "There's other factors, too ... how much it will vary year to year. It's not only me, but the team is going to have to work around potential new situations in the CBA that will make it more difficult to sign someone to a long-term deal."

Aware that the rules could change under a new agreement, several NHL clubs signed their own players to decade-long deals last offseason.

Pittsburgh re-upped star Sidney Crosby with a 12-year, \$104 million contract, and L.A. kept Jonathan Quick in the fold with a 10-year, \$58 million pact.

The Blues, even with one season left on Pietrangelo's three-year entry-level contract, did attempt to re-sign their No. 1 defenseman.

With Pietrangelo due a base salary of \$787,500 with bonuses that could lift him to \$3.2 million in 2012-13, Blues general manager Doug Armstrong and Pietrangelo's agent, Don Meehan, spoke last summer, but the talks were considered "informal."

"I had meetings with Doug, and from the organization's point of view, they conveyed every interest in saying to us that Alex is a very important part of the St. Louis Blues' future," Meehan said. "We had an open discussion in terms of what our collective thoughts were in terms of what the new rules would be. Of course, (the league and union) haven't quite figured that out as of today's date, so you can imagine when we spoke (with Armstrong) in the summertime, we were all unclear in terms of what the new rules were going to be.

"At that time, Doug indicated that as long as we knew their intention was to re-sign him that the organization felt comfortable in waiting until we had a new CBA. We in turn responded by saying that Alex was very happy in St. Louis, had been well-treated by the organization and from his perspective wanted to remain with St. Louis for a long time and be a part of their future.

"There's really no fear from Alex's end in terms of waiting to see what the new landscape will be. We're not representing a player that was looking for an edge or predicting the future. That's not what he's all about. St. Louis recognizes his value, we know what it is, too. To compliment Doug, he approached this in nothing but a sincere good-faith gesture and we were happy with that. Alex was happy with that."

Pietrangelo said that it was "a compliment" to be considered a priority and called it "exciting to be able to start" the process of signing a new contract, but he insisted that he's in no rush.

"It got to a point where we thought we'd take a step back and see what the CBA brings," Pietrangelo said. "It could work out in my favor, it may not, but we wanted to see some sort of clarity before we made a decision. You

always want some sort of security. It's definitely going to have to be the right situation for me in terms of the length of the deal and where the team is headed

"But I definitely enjoy playing in St. Louis and I love the city. There's definitely interest on both sides to figure something out for the long term ... there isn't another team that I'd rather be a part of."

If the lockout is lifted soon, Pietrangelo's camp and the Blues could resume talks. If the season were canceled and the work stoppage continued into next summer, Pietrangelo could become a restricted free agent July 1.

"We're happy to resume discussions once we all have greater clarity on what the new CBA is," Meehan said. "There's not going to be any rush from Alex's point of view and the organization's point of view. They've got a lot of things to tend to at the very beginning. I wouldn't say that I would be expecting Doug to come at us real quick, nor would we be at him real quick. We're all very comfortable with where Alex is, and what he is in the game, and timing isn't of a concern to us."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.13.2012

646359 St Louis Blues

Blues hosting youth hockey camp at Scottrade Center

Staff

ST. LOUIS - The St. Louis Blues are hosting a Youth Hockey Holiday Camp on Dec. 26, Dec. 28 and Dec. 29 at Scottrade Center.

Players will learn the importance of teamwork, discipline and progressive training while learning from Blues alumni such as Al MacInnis, Bernie Federko, Keith Tkachuk as well as Bruce Racine, who will be on hand to work with goaltenders.

The camp is for children ages 5-14 and will run from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. daily. All campers will receive two hours of ice time per day, off-ice training, a Blues Youth Hockey Camp jersey, a youth camp T-shirt and more.

Registration is \$250 per child and proceeds will benefit the Blues 14 Fund; spots are limited. Visit the Blues' website at www.stlouisblues.com to register online.

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 12.13.2012

646360 Tampa Bay Lightning

Bolts' Thompson fits with hometown ECHL team in Alaska

By Erik Erlendsson

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: 12.13.2012 646361 Tampa Bay Lightning

Federal mediator prompts no progress in NHL talks

Times staff, wires

The latest round of labor talks ended with the sides in different rooms.

The locked-out players association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with a federal mediator in suburban New Jersey for about 61/2 hours, holding discussions that didn't appear to move the sides closer to a deal to save the season.

Neither side made a proposal on the lockout's 88th day.

Mediator Scot Beckenbaugh asked the 13 players who attended what the union's response would be if the league brought back to the table its last offer, which included three points it said were nonnegotiable: a player contract limit of five years, seven for a club to re-sign its own player; a 10-year term on the new collective bargaining agreement, with a mutual optout option after eight years; and no contract buyouts to help teams with the salary cap and no caps on escrow in the transition to the new deal. "It wasn't much of a decision," free agent Brendan Morrison said. "I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't ... so we have to keep working."

The Lightning's Marty St. Louis said he was asked by the union to attend but declined. St. Louis last week was part of the players' meetings with owners that appeared to make progress until the league Thursday angrily broke off negotiations. He said Wednesday he is better off now on the sideline

St. Louis had been so "crushed" at the end of last week, he said at the time he might take a vacation. After taking time to decompress, he has been back on the ice in Brandon this week. "This week I want to get a good week of work and see where I'm at at Christmas," he said. "You've got to stay prepared."

No owners were at the meeting. The league was represented by commissioner Gary Bettman, deputy commissioner Bill Daly and its lawyers.

"Really, there's nothing new to report," Daly said in brief comments to the media. He didn't take questions.

No further meetings were scheduled.

Times staff writer Damian Cristodero contributed to this report.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.13.2012

646362 Tampa Bay Lightning

No rest (or vacation) for Tampa Bay Lightning's Marty St. Louis

Posted by Damian Cristodero

Marty St. Louis said he was asked by the Players' Association to take part in Wednesday's negotiating session with the league on a new collective bargaining agreement. But the Tampa Bay Lightning star said he is better off right now on the sidelines waiting to hear what comes of the talks.

St. Louis last week was part of the players' face-to-face meetings with owners that appeared to make progress until the league on Thursday angrily broke off negotiations. In the process, St. Louis missed two skates with teammates at the Ice Sports Forum in Brandon. He sounded as if he would miss more. After talks broke down, he texted he would not skate "any time soon" and that perhaps it was time to take a vacation.

But St. Louis has been at the rink all this week,.

"I was just pretty crushed on Friday," St. Louis said of last week's negotiating meltdown and why he believed a vacation was a good idea. "I just didn't expect that. I thought we were close."

But after a couple of days to decompress, St. Louis found some equilibrium and instead got back on the ice, and not just for the usual three-on-three games. Before and after games on Monday, St. Louis led his nine teammates in passing and conditioning drills.

"This week I want to get a good week of work and see where I'm at at Christmas," he said. "You've got to stay prepared. You don't do yourself a favor if you don't stay in shape. I'm just trying to do that. I'm trying to catch up right now."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.13.2012

646363 Tampa Bay Lightning

Tampa Bay Lightning's Steven Stamkos to headline charity game in Toronto

Posted by Damian Cristodero

Tampa Bay Lightning star Steve Stamkos will headline the RBC Play Hockey Holiday Challenge on Dec. 19 in Toronto.

Here is the announcement from the Players' Association:

TORONTO, December 12, 2012 — The National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA) and RBC today announced that RBC Play Hockey

ambassadors Steven Stamkos and P.K. Subban will lead teams of fellow NHL players in the RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge on Wednesday, December 19, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. at the Mattamy Athletic Centre in Toronto. The venue features an NHL-sized rink that is part of Ryerson University's state-of-the-art sports facility, site of the former Maple Leaf Gardens.

Two-time NHL leading goal-scorer and two-time NHL All-Star Steven Stamkos, and two-time World Junior Championship gold medallist and 2010-11 NHL All-Rookie Team member P.K. Subban will be joined on the ice by more than 30 NHLPA members for a 5-on-5, 60-minute game. The players scheduled to participate include Dion Phaneuf, Phil Kessel, James Neal, Tomas Kaberle, Mike Komisarek, Logan Couture, Kris Versteeg, Niklas Kronwall and John-Michael Liles. Complete Team Stamkos and Team Subban rosters will be announced in the coming days.

"The RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge is a great opportunity to share the joy and excitement of hockey with our fans. I'm looking forward to playing alongside this impressive lineup of fellow NHL players while helping to raise funds to benefit local hockey programs across the country," said Steven Stamkos, RBC Play Hockey ambassador and NHLPA member. "RBC is committed to helping hockey happen, at every level and in every community across North America and I'm proud to partner with them and bring this event to Toronto."

The RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge tickets will be priced at \$25 (including HST, may be subject to additional fees) and will be available starting at 10 a.m. on Thursday, December 13 at ticketmaster.ca, charge by phone at 1-855-985-5000, and at all Ticketmaster Retail Outlets. Tickets will be available at the Mattamy Athletic Centre Box Office starting Friday, December 14. Proceeds from ticket sales will benefit grassroots hockey initiatives through the NHLPA Goals & Dreams fund and RBC Play Hockey.

"The NHLPA shares RBC's commitment to supporting hockey at the grassroots level," said Mathieu Schneider, NHLPA Special Assistant to the Executive Director and former NHL player. "The participating NHLPA members are excited about the chance to skate in front of Toronto hockey fans on December 19th. The Players are committed to growing our great sport while raising funds to help less fortunate children get the equipment and resources they need to play the game."

The NHLPA Goals & Dreams fund is the largest grassroots hockey assistance program in the world. Founded in 1999, NHLPA Goals & Dreams has contributed over \$21 million to grassroots hockey programs and related causes in more than 30 countries. Through the donation of equipment grants, the program has given more than 60,000 deserving children the opportunity to play hockey and benefit from the sport's commitment to teamwork, discipline and physical fitness. For more information, visit NHLPA.com.

RBC Play Hockey is one of the largest corporately funded hockey programs that supports grassroots hockey in communities across North America. To date, RBC has provided more than \$1,500,000 in grants to over 120 hockey programs – ranging from learn-to-skate, ball hockey and equipment-sharing programs to reduced registration, access to ice and hockey clinic initiatives. As a premier partner of Hockey Canada and USA Hockey, RBC is an official sponsor of each country's men's and women's national teams, the 2013 IIHF World Junior Championship, and Canada's National Junior A Championship - the RBC Cup. For more information, visit rbcplayhockey.com, follow us on Twitter @RBCPlayHockey or on Facebook www.facebook.com/rbcplayhockey

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.13.2012

646364 Toronto Maple Leafs

World juniors: Superstars who were cut early in their careers

Bob Mitchell-Sports Reporter

Getting cut from a team early in an athlete's life doesn't necessarily mean the end of their hopes of a successful career in that sport. Some have even gone on to become superstars:

SIDNEY CROSBY

The Pittsburgh Penguins superstar is one of the best hockey players in the world. Few will forget his game-winning gold medal goal for Team Canada at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. But "Sid the Kid" was left off the

2006 team as the Wayne Gretzky-run squad decided to go with a veteran team that finished out of the medals. Among his many career highlights: He's the youngest NHL player to reach 100 points and the youngest to captain a Stanley Cup winning team.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Long before "Air Jordan" became an international legend, he was cut from his high school basketball team in the 1978-79 season. He tried out for the varsity team during his sophomore year at Emsley A. Laney High School in Wilmington, N.C., but at 5-foot-11, he was considered too short to play and was cut. But he made the junior team and continued to develop. The University of North Carolina player went on to lead the Chicago Bulls to three consecutive NBA championships from 1991-1993 before retiring and then returned for another three-peat from 1996-1998. The five-time league MVP is now a majority owner of the Charlotte Bobcats.

MARK BUEHRLE

The newly-acquired Toronto Blue Jays starter was cut from his Francis Howell North High School baseball team in St. Charles, Mo., during his sophomore year. But that setback never stopped him from becoming a terrific pitcher. On April 18, 2007, he pitched a no-hitter for the Chicago White Sox against the Texas Rangers. On July 23, 2009, he pitched the 18th perfect game in major league baseball history against the Tampa Bay Rays

SCOTT STEVENS

After being cut from the 1984 Canada Cup team, the rugged New Jersey Devils defenceman didn't hide his bitterness, telling the media "I might take out U.S. citizenship the next time." Stevens didn't but despite being one of the NHL's toughest and most punishing body checkers, he was also cut from the 1987 Canada Cup team. He later made future international teams, like the 1991 Canada Cup, 1996 World Cup and 1998 Olympic squads, among others.

STEVE YZERMAN

Although he captained the Detroit Red Wings for 20 years, the consummate on-ice leader endured pride-deflating moments along with career-threatening injuries. Canadian coach Mike Keenan cut him from both the 1987 and 1991 Canada Cup squads. But he went on to become a two-time Olympian, skating for Team Canada in 1998 at Nagano and in 2002 in Salt Lake where he helped Canada capture its first gold medal in hockey since 1952. In 2010, he was the GM of Canada's gold medal effort in Vancouver.

WENDEL CLARK

The former Maple Leafs captain was the kind of player every GM loved to have on his team. Yet 'Captain Crunch' was also cut from the 1987 Canada Cup squad. It hurt but he had company. Other superstars who Keenan cut from that famous team included Yzerman, Stevens, Dino Ciccarelli, Rob Ramage and Al MacInnis.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.13.2012

646365 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Idle players suit up for RBC Charity Challenge

Mark Zwolinski-Sports Reporter

A group of locked-out NHLers — including Steven Stamkos and several Toronto Maple Leafs — will host a game in Toronto Dec. 19 to raise money for charity.

The two-time NHL leading goal scorer will be joined by fellow sniper Phil Kessel in the RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge at Ryerson University's Mattamy Athletic Centre on the site of the former Maple Leaf Gardens.

"The RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge is a great opportunity to share the joy and excitement of hockey with our fans. I'm looking forward to playing alongside this impressive lineup of fellow NHL players while helping to raise funds to benefit local hockey programs across the country," said Stamkos, who has been locked out with his fellow NHLers for 90 days now.

Some 30 players in all will participate in the charity game, including P.K. Subban, Dion Phaneuf, James Neal, Tomas Kaberle, Mike Komisarek, Logan Couture, Kris Versteeg, Niklas Kronwall and John Michael Liles.

The game is scheduled for 7 p.m. and will be a five-on-five format for 60 minutes

The RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge tickets will be priced at \$25 (including HST, may be subject to additional fees) and will be available starting at 10 a.m. on Thursday, December 13 at ticketmaster.ca, charge by phone at 1-855-985-5000 and at all Ticketmaster Retail Outlets. Tickets will be available at the Mattamy Athletic Centre Box Office starting Friday, December 14.

Proceeds from ticket sales will benefit grassroots hockey initiatives through the NHLPA Goals & Dreams fund and RBC Play Hockey.

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646366 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs defenceman Jake Gardiner might have concussion

Mark Zwolinski

Jake Gardiner has been a quick learner ever since he stepped into a fulltime role on the Maple Leafs' blueline, and he's continued what appears to be an all-star calibre campaign with the Toronto Marlies during the lockout.

Now, however, Gardiner is learning about the virtues of patience when dealing with a head injury.

The 22-year-old absorbed a heavy blow to his head Saturday in a game against Rochester, heavy enough to force the Marlies to exercise every caution before letting him back on the ice.

"The hit came from the other side — he (Gardiner) had gone in at the side of the net to retrieve a puck and the other player came in from behind the net," Marlies coach Dallas Eakins said. "He (Gardiner) got flung and there was contact with the face area. We'll keep on top of it and whether it's a neck or a concussion, we won't have him back out there until he is ready to go."

The Marlies have been practising all week in preparation for games this weekend, but Gardiner has yet to return to the ice since the second-period hit Saturday.

Gardiner is showing concussion symptoms, but Eakins says the injury is not being called a concussion.

"He's good, but it's funny with these (hits to the head). They're all different and every player is different. Some guys get knocked out cold and lay on the ice but get up and are fine, and some get a brush and are out for a long time." Eakins said.

"(Gardiner) got hit from behind, he didn't see it coming. He got a big whiplash, but he finished the play and the period, and he scored a goal. Between periods he said (his neck) was stiff and he didn't feel right. Headaches and things like that are symptoms of concussions and we're not saying he has a concussion. He wanted to go back out on the ice but we held him back. He's improved every day and every day he is better . . . but he's still having a pain in his neck and the headache is still there a bit. Just that feeling, he doesn't quite feel himself. So we held him out and we will continue to do so until he is 100 per cent right."

The Marlies play two games this weekend, and there is nothing definitive on Gardiner's status for a return to the lineup.

Eakins said goalie Jussi Rynnas, who has been sidelined since Nov. 16 with a pulled groin muscle, could play on Sunday.

Gardiner, meanwhile, is ranked second in AHL scoring among defencemen with nine goals in 22 games. Hockey Night in Canada's Don Cherry tweeted about him earlier this week, referring to Gardiner as one of the best players he's seen in the AHL this season.

"He's an American, he's big, got nice hands and an edge to his play," Cherry tweeted.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.13.2012

646367 Toronto Maple Leafs

Marlies' Jake Gardiner sidelined by head injury

By Lance Hornby, Toronto Sun

TORONTO - While the city of Toronto deals with falling pieces of the Gardiner Expressway, the Maple Leafs are concerned about the damage to star defenceman Jake Gardiner's noggin.

Gardiner was not present for Wednesday's workouts, the first in three days since he was rattled by a hit to the head in Saturday's home game against Rochester. Gardiner, who scored a power-play goal on the charging penalty assessed on the play, did not come back in the third period.

Coach Dallas Eakins played down the possibility of a concussion on the weekend after Gardiner reported no nausea on Sunday, but told reporters Wednesday that headaches and concussion-like symptoms have persisted. It's unlikely Gardiner plays weekend games in Rochester and home against Grand Rapids.

Any lengthy sidelining of Gardiner would be unfortunate should the NHL start up soon. The Marlies' highest scoring defenceman and power play scorer was sure to be recalled by the Leafs.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.13.2012

646368 Toronto Maple Leafs

Being healthy scratch is good news for Canadian kids

By Terry Koshan, Toronto Sun

CALGARY - Players hate being told they're a healthy scratch.

But when it happens at Canada's junior team selection camp, it's about the best news a player can hear.

And so it was for a dozen of Canada's hopefuls Wednesday morning, when head coach Steve Spott told them they would not be playing against the University of Alberta that afternoon.

It's unofficial, but what it means is that those players have made the team.

In the group were the six returning players from Canada's 2012 junior team -- defencemen Dougie Hamilton and Scott Harrington and forwards Jonathan Huberdeau, Boone Jenner, Ryan Strome and Mark Scheifele. Joining them were defencemen Morgan Rielly and Xavier Ouellet and forwards Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Phillip Danault, Charles Hudon and Brett Ritchie.

"With the kids who were not in the lineup, those are kids we have a deep book on," Spott said. "Guys we are familiar with. People assume coaches make these decisions. Players make these decisions."

Still, some weren't ready to put themselves on Canada's roster quite yet.

"I try not to pay too much attention to it," Maple Leafs prospect Morgan Rielly said. "Hopefully I get a chance to play (Thursday against the CIS) and prove myself. And if I do, who knows what that means? I try not to make any judgements on what (being a healthy scratch) means or anything like that

Even Scheifele was not ready to say he would be going to Russia. A returning player would have to break his leg to be cut the following year.

"You can't take anything for granted," Scheifele said. "If I play (Thursday), I'll work my hardest and show coaches I deserve a spot on this team."

Perhaps, but there is one certainty. The parents of the players who are healthy scratches Thursday can start making travel arrangements to get to Ufa, Russia. Their kid will be on the team.

SITTING DOESN'T SIT WELL WITH SCHEIFELE

Mark Scheifele would have preferred to play Wednesday, if only to continue to learn his new position.

The Winnipeg Jets prospect, a healthy scratch against the University of Alberta, acknowledged that playing right wing instead of centre has put him on a learning curve.

"I caught myself thinking too much (in the Red-White game Tuesday)," Scheifele said. "It was my first time doing it in an actual game and it was totally different. Doing it in practice, and then in a game, it becomes a real-life situation."

If the pieces fall correctly for coach Steve Spott, Scheifele, who got tips from his coach with the Barrie Colts, Dale Hawerchuk, before departing for the selection camp, will be on a line with Ryan Nugent

Hopkins at centre and Jonathan Huberdeau on the left side.

Though the Jets say they're still talking with Hockey Canada about their plans for Scheifele if the NHL lockout ends, the 19-year-old is moving forward with the idea that he will be in Russia for the duration of the tournament.

"It eases your mind a little bit," Scheifele said. "If I make this team and I am here for good, it helps. Clears my mind."

FROM THE HASH MARKS

Players say all the time what an honour it is that they get a chance to wear Canada's colours, but as teens, they're not always capable of following through. Case in point was the overall uninspiring effort against Alberta. Spott acknowledged he was disappointed, and for good reason. Where was the passion? Where was the desire? It was inexcusable for the players to come up lame when jobs on the junior team are there for the taking, no matter that Alberta is ranked No. 1 in the CIS. "I expected more," Spott said. "Players are given an opportunity to shine. There were some players who did not take advantage of a very good opportunity because there are jobs to be had here. I said from Day 1, don't have any regrets. And some players may have some after (the first cuts are made)." ... If there is any concern with the way that forward Tom Wilson plays with reckless abandon at times, remember that Hockey Canada was able to convince the rambunctious Steve Downie in successive years (2006-07) to play within boundaries. If Downie could do it, there's no excuse for any other player to not follow suit. But it didn't help Wilson's cause that he was serving a charging minor when Alberta scored its fourth goal ... Though Malcolm Subban had a rough first period, allowing three goals on the first seven shots he faced, few goalies would have stopped the slapshot that Torrie Dyck fired over Subban's left shoulder ... Tyler Graovac, one of the five eventual cuts, had a great chance on a breakaway, while Canada was shorthanded, but the puck rolled off his stick before he could get a shot off against Laurent Brossoit ... Aside from Wilson, there was no shortage of players for Canada willing to throw the body around. Griffin Reinhart nailed Burke Gallimore and Mark McNeill crunched Rhett Rachinski into the side boards. Even Nathan MacKinnon got into it, hitting Zach Dailey early in the third period ... Defenceman Mathew Dumba, despite being the seventh overall pick by the Minnesota Wild in June, has no guarantees of making the team. But he made a nice play to get back and take a scoring chance away from Rachinski ... Both Daniel Catenacci and Frank Corrado were on the bubble heading into the game. But there was Catenacci setting up Corrado for Canada's only goal, a hard shot to the top corner that beat Brossoit.

POINT SHOTS

Ouellet, nursing a sprained ankle, skated in the morning and reported only good things afterward. "There was a lot of physicality in his skate where he had to battle and he came off unscathed," Spott said ... He might not be a household name, but it was not surprising that Hudon was a healthy scratch. Spott thinks the Montreal Canadiens got Hudon with a steal in the fifth round of the 2012 NHL draft and figures he can use the 18-year-old in any situation ... Jonathan Drouin's failure to capitalize on a turnover summed up Canada's inability to score. Drouin intercepted a Jordan Rowley pass, but his feeble backhand on Jake Paterson harmlessly went wide ... Canada's forwards appeared to be nervous. We expected more from the likes of MacKinnon, Drouin and Ty Rattie.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.13.2012

646369 Toronto Maple Leafs

Phaneuf to hit ice at Maple Leaf Gardens

By Lance Hornby, Toronto Sun

TORONTO - Since 1931, every captain of the Leafs has played at Maple Leaf Gardens

Dion Phaneuf probably didn't think he would continue the tradition under the circumstance of an NHL lockout, but these days idled players will take game action anywhere they can find it. Phaneuf and Toronto teammates Phil Kessel, John-Michael Liles and Mike Komisarek are among the preliminary lineup for the RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge on Dec. 19 at 7 p.m.

It's at the elevated, renovated, rechristened Gardens, now the 2,600-seat Mattamy Recreation Centre at Ryerson University. Co-captains Steven Stamkos of the Lightning and the Canadiens' P.K. Subban will be compiling full rosters in the coming days for the 5-on-5, 60-minute game. Others scheduled to participate include ex-Leafs Kris Versteeg and Tomas Kaberle, as well as Logan Couture, James Neal and Niklas Kronwall.

The NHL Players Association and the title sponsor bank are charging a base fee of \$25 and donating funds to grassroots hockey initiatives through the players' Goals and Dreams Fund and RBC Play Hockey.

Tickets are available starting at 10 a.m. Thursday through ticketmaster.ca and at the Mattamy box office later in the week.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.13.2012

646370 Toronto Maple Leafs

Docs advise Marlies to keep Gardiner off the ice

By Lance Hornby, Toronto Sun

TORONTO - While the city of Toronto continues to deal with falling chunks of the old Gardiner Expressway, the Maple Leafs don't want young defenceman Jake Gardiner missing a chunk of playing time because of a head and neck injury.

Though he isn't calling it an out-right concussion, Toronto Marlies coach Dallas Eakins was advised by medical personnel on Wednesday that Gardiner has some symptoms and to keep him off the ice for now. Gardiner was rocked by a hit in Saturday's home game against Rochester and eventually left the contest.

"Jake has improved a bit today," Eakins said late Wednesday after the team returned from a two-day off-ice break to work out at the MasterCard Centre. "But he just doesn't feel himself. He has some headaches and there's pain in his neck. If you saw the hit, he was looking backwards behind his net and he got a good whiplash."

Gardiner, who scored his team-leading fifth power-play goal on the charging penalty assessed to Americans' forward Kevin Porter on the play, did not come back in the third period. Gardiner reported no nausea or severe headaches on Sunday, but the persistent pain convinced the Marlies and their parent team to "err on the side of caution" as Eakins has repeated the past few days.

"I already had him sitting out the first of the games this weekend (in Rochester) as part of our scheduled rotation of defencemen," said Eakins, who has eight blueliners when at full strength. "Now he's going to have to go through the concussion protocol, hopefully participate in a non-contact practice, then a contact practice. So I don't see him playing at all this weekend (when the Marlies return home to face Grand Rapids on Sunday at Ricoh Coliseum). Until he's symptom-free, we'll just have to wait."

The Marlies next game after that is Wednesday in Cleveland against the Lake Erie Monsters.

Any lengthy sidelining of Gardiner would be unfortunate should the National Hockey League season start up soon. The Marlies' highest scoring defenceman with nine goals was sure to be recalled by the Leafs, where he spent almost all of last season and made the NHL all-rookie team. His superb skating and shot have made the Minnesotan one of the most dangerous players in the American Hockey League this year.

The Leafs had a long wait for goaltender James Reimer to emerge from a concussion and related neck problems in 2011-12. After an early-season collision with Brian Gionta of the Canadiens, Reimer was out for weeks and never reached the level of confidence he had prior to the mishap.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.13.2012

646371 Toronto Maple Leafs

Edmonton has little to gain by funding Oilers' arena

Larry Wong/Edmonton Journal/Postmedia News

VANCOUVER — Let me say this about the ongoing Edmonton arena soap opera, the latest chapter of which began to unfold at city council Wednesday in the Alberta capital ...

No, let me first don the asbestos underwear, double-check to make sure my life insurance is paid up, and clear space in my email inbox.

There, all done.

Now: what if, instead of thinking of new and creative ways to raise and spend hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to further enrich the already wealthy drug store billionaire Daryl Katz, Edmonton took a second look at the existing arena — the one with his company name on it — and said: "You know, this place is still pretty good. Not the best, not what a new one would be, not as good as Toronto's or Montreal's or Vancouver's, not in a great location ... but good enough."

It's radical thinking, I know.

Everyone is all wound up about the prospect of a shiny, brand-spankingnew arena/retail complex that would breathe new life into a moribund downtown, and if that's truly what moving out of Rexall Place would do, it's understandable why council might buy it.

(Although MTS Centre in Winnipeg is lovely, and in a perfect location, but they tell me you can still fire a cannon down Portage Avenue lots of nongame nights without fear of hitting a human.)

Not to be a total contrarian here — I haven't covered many games in Edmonton since the Oilers' 2006 run to the Stanley Cup final — but is the former Northlands Coliseum such a hellhole?

Is it totally beneath a mid-sized Canadian market?

Paul Chiasson/The Canadian Press

It's been renovated and retro-fitted, jazzed up with fancy electronic signage and concourse-level luxury boxes, a spectacular home-team dressing room complex and rink-level lounges that allow the big spenders to pat the players on the shoulders or yell insults at them as they enter and exit their boudoir.

It has aged gracefully, without anything like the wear-and-tear and general air of decay that has afflicted its Long Island doppelganger or even the slightly younger Joe Louis Arena in Detroit.

What, exactly, tops the list of things that are wrong with it?

The artificial ice plant is "tired," so what used to be the best ice surface in the National Hockey League is now only average? Well, replace the ice plant. Dig up the concrete. Probably not a huge-ticket item.

Rexall Place doesn't have enough luxury boxes to produce the kind of revenue NHL owners have come to expect from their sports palaces built

with someone else's money? Gee, given what we have learned in the last decade (more specifically, the last week) about NHL owners, cry us a river.

The fairgrounds area around the arena is kind of down-market and sketchy? Northlands, the exhibition association, is still insisting on a cut of some of the revenues generated by the building it operates? The nerve of those greedy buggers.

However the government contribution is worded, or camouflaged, it doesn't come from the Arena Fairy

The concourses are overcrowded and don't allow for enough high-end food and beverage concessions? The seats aren't comfy enough? Granted, the demographics have changed and are changing all the time — regular folks can't afford the prices tickets cost now — but are Edmontonians, even wealthy ones, that demanding?

Or is this just one more gimme-gimme stampede in the making (Calgary will be next in line looking for public money), another railroad job (the planned Edmonton downtown arena is on what used to be CN Rail land) by another team owner, following a tried-and-true game plan that has served the pro sports monopolies beautifully on this continent for generations?

Fear and envy. An owner's best weapons.

There is a long, detailed, highly analytical story on this topic by Patrick Hruby on a site called Sports on Earth that explains the economic fallout of our North American culture of sports welfare better than a couple hundred words in a sports column ever could Read it and weep, Edmontonians, because one way or another, you're the meat in the sandwich.

However the government contribution is worded, or camouflaged, it doesn't come from the Arena Fairy. It's tax money, and not a user tax, either. It comes out of the pockets of hockey fans and people who give not one whit about the NHL alike.

Having been through something similar with the \$563-million (as far as we know) renovation of a 27-year-old B.C. Place Stadium, for which the province offered considerably less opportunity for public consultation, it's encouraging that at least Edmonton's council has made this a knock-down, drag-out fight, in trying to drive something resembling a hard bargain with

But Katz's \$100-million contribution to the \$475-million (and rising) project appears to be largely out of future revenues, and there remains a "missing" \$100-million component to the project that is supposed to come from "other orders of government." To date, no other government — i.e., provincial — has shown any great willingness to fill that gap.

Wednesday, the Katz Group, if not the man himself, returned cap in hand to council, two months after the city voted to walk away from the arena deal over a request from the Oilers owner for another \$210-million.

That came not long after Katz clumsily tried to frighten the city into thinking he might move the team to Seattle, or ... well, somewhere else. But Edmontonians had been there, done that, with Peter Pocklington a lifetime ago, and the implied threat backfired.

The arena deal the city had agreed upon wasn't all one-sided. Katz would sign a 35-year lease, pay to be the rink's operator, and back and forth the money, under various guises, would flow from one side to the other.

The catch is that the price tag reportedly will be more like \$700-million, or even higher, by the time the surrounding development and bells and whistles and infrastructure are completed — and at some point, even as well-intentioned as the mayor and councillors may be, it seems they are going to sign a deal that inevitably will add a considerable tax burden to the populace and probably result in some really valuable programs and services being trimmed in return for ... what?

A better self-image, a sense of big-leagueness, a more vibrant feel to at least a few blocks surrounding the arena, on game nights? Sure. Like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Better than losing the team.

Fear and envy. Quell one, satisfy the other.

Jettison an old arena, build a new one on credit. It's a disposable world. Someone will pay. Someone always does.

National Post LOADED: 12.13.2012

646372 Toronto Maple Leafs

Marlies defenceman Jake Gardiner dealing with concussion-like symptoms

Canadian Press

TORONTO — The Toronto Marlies aren't taking any chances with standout defenceman Jake Gardiner.

The 22-year-old blue-liner did not skate with the AHL team Wednesday, still shaken following a big hit in a game Saturday against Rochester.

Marlies coach Dallas Eakins says Gardiner is suffering symptoms consistent with a concussion, though the injury hasn't been labelled as such

"He's got a bunch of issues in his neck and some headaches, so yes it could be symptomatic to a concussion or could be symptomatic to neck pain," Eakins said at practice.

National Post LOADED: 12.13.2012

646373 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs' Matt Frattin whets appetite for job in NHL

Michael Traikos

Brian Burke shows warmth amid NHL's labour darkness

Each of the children descended the ramp slowly. Some had breathing apparatus to pull alongside, some were in wheelchairs, and some were attached to intravenous drips from bags with grave-looking symbols affixed to them.

Christmas music was playing softly in the background as they entered the room from the main hallway. And one by one, as they reached the end of the ramp, they smiled; first at the sight of Canadian Forces personnel dressed as elves, who helped distribute gifts, and then at the welcome line that was waiting around the corner.

Former Toronto Maple Leafs captains Wendel Clark and Darryl Sittler were there. At the front of the line was the team's current president and general manager, Brian Burke.

"A lot of these kids have no idea who I am when I walk in," Burke said. "It's not the same recognition as with a player. But after a little visit, and leaving a present and maybe signing something for them, I get a big kick out of it."

Read more...

TORONTO — Matt Frattin does not believe in living in the past. But on Tuesday, he was willing to make an exception.

Along with the rest of his teammates, the Toronto Marlies forward attended a required class on the history of the Maple Leafs. It was informative and a bit inspiring, said Frattin. But at the same time, it might have also provided a cautionary lesson: Although the storied Original Six franchise once had a monopoly on winning the Stanley Cup, that means squat these days.

It is a reason why Frattin, who spent 56 games with the Leafs last year and then had a breakout performance in the American Hockey League playoffs final before wrecking his knee in the Calder Cup semi-finals, is taking nothing for granted. He knows there is talk of being called up to the NHL when the lockout eventually ends. But he also knows that at his age, you are only as good as the last time you stepped on the ice.

So the 24-year-old keeps looking forward, rather than backward.

"I don't think there's too many people that they've pencilled in," Frattin said of the Leafs' roster.

"It's something that you have to work for. I'm sure when training camp starts, it will be up to me. It begins on Day 1 there, where you have to earn

your spot. There's a lot of guys that want the same spot. You have to battle for it still."

If and when Leafs training camp begins, Frattin will compete against Marlies teammates Nazem Kadri and veteran NHLers Matthew Lombardi, Tim Connolly and David Steckel for a job on the third or fourth line.

Right now, however, Frattin seems to be the one to beat. Despite missing 5½ months after undergoing surgery for torn ligaments in his knee, he has picked up right where he left off. Frattin has seven goals and four assists in 10 games this season and 17 goals in his past 23 games going back to last year's playoffs.

"Every game you want to score goals," said Frattin, who has been held off the scoresheet only twice so far. "That's what you want to do and that's what I need to keep doing."

What the Edmonton native has done is separate himself from the rest of the pack, something that is playing out all over the league.

It begins on Day 1 there where you have to earn your spot. There's a lot of guys that want the same spot. You have to battle for it still

With the NHL on hiatus, the minors have become a two-tier league of endof-the-road journeyman and young stars.

The season is still young, but Frattin, defenceman Jake Gardiner (17 points in 22 games) and forward Kadri (21 points) are clearly in the latter category. When the NHL resumes, they will either have jobs waiting for them or will be expected to compete for jobs. Either way, they are only in the AHL temporarily.

"The goal of the organization is to leave players and let them develop at the right pace," said Leafs vice-president of hockey operations Dave Poulin, who added that training camp might not be long enough for bubble players to steal a spot when the NHL resumes.

"It could take a little while for it to play out. It might not shake out on Day 1."

Still, the Leafs know what they have in Frattin.

Marlies head coach Dallas Eakins recently called Frattin a coach's dream, the type of player who, regardless of where he is playing or whom he is playing with, finds ways to be "dangerous every time he's on the ice." The comments seemed directed towards Leafs head coach Randy Carlyle.

When the NHL season starts up again, the Leafs will be looking to fill holes on their bottom two lines.

Even for the amount of time off, he looks very, very powerful

And while Frattin clearly has a nose for the net, his ability to forecheck aggressively, play physical and be responsible defensively might be more valuable than his offensive production.

"I was standing with Randy the other day watching and he's very physical, he's so strong on his stick right now," Poulin said. "Even for the amount of time off, he looks very, very powerful. His strength on his stick and his power were evident yesterday." In Frattin's mind, yesterday is in the past. It is what he does tomorrow and the day after that really count.

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646374 Washington Capitals

Matt Hendricks taking part in USO holiday tour

Posted by Katie Carrera

Supporting those serving in the United States military is nothing new for Capitals forward Matt Hendricks, whose father Doug is a former Marine.

He's a fixture at local Wounded Warrior events, and he and his wife, Kim, help organize local support for Defending the Blue Line, a charity that ensures children of military members can participate in hockey by providing free equipment, camps and financial assistance for league fees.

This time, Hendricks will be taking his efforts abroad and visiting troops overseas with the USO Holiday Tour led by Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Nationals pitchers Ross Detwiler and

Craig Stammen, singer Kellie Pickler and comedian Iliza Shlesinger are taking part in the trip as well.

Because of national security concerns, Hendricks and the rest of the civilians don't know where they're headed, but that doesn't dampen their enthusiasm.

Washington Post LOADED: 12.13.2012

646375 Winnipeg Jets

Jets won't confirm Scheifele in for World Junior long haul

Mark Scheifele

Although the signs point to Mark Scheifele staying with Team Canada for the duration of the 2013 World Junior Hockey Championship, the Winnipeg Jets are not quite ready to make the declaration public.

After Sun Media hockey writer Terry Koshan — who is covering the final evaluation camp in Calgary — wrote that the Jets don't plan to recall their first round pick in the 2011 NHL Entry Draft even if the NHL and NHLPA find a way to get a new collective bargaining agreement signed during the tournament, the Jets were bombarded by media members seeking confirmation.

As of early Wednesday evening, a Jets spokesman said a final determination has not yet been made and that talks with Hockey Canada about the matter in question were ongoing.

Scheifele, who was chosen seventh overall and is enjoying a successful season with the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League, is currently slotted to play right wing on the top line with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Jonathan Huberdeau, fellow first rounders from the Class of 2011.

Although there has been plenty of concern about what might happen should a CBA get signed in the near future, the Toronto Maple Leafs were the first NHL club to say publicly that 2012 first-rounder Morgan Rielly would remain with Team Canada for the entire tournament, no matter what happens.

Other teams are expected to follow suit, as pulling individuals out of the event after it's already started would leave Hockey Canada in a bind.

Team Canada is expected to name its final roster on Thursday night.

The 2013 World Junior Hockey Championship opens on Dec. 26 in Ufa, Russia.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.13.2012

646376 Websites

ESPN / Stephen Gionta scrapping his way up -- again

By Scott Burnside

In terms of reunions, this would have to fall into the bittersweet category.

You could hardly blame Stephen Gionta for thinking or, at the very least, hoping that he had permanently put the American Hockey League in his rearview mirror with a strong performance in the playoffs last spring with the New Jersey Devils.

But the NHL lockout has disrupted many a best-laid plan, and so it was that after working out with his frozen-out Devils teammates -- oddly enough at the team's practice rink in downtown Newark -- Gionta signed recently with the Devils' AHL affiliate in Albany.

But Gionta, the younger brother of Montreal Canadiens captain Brian Gionta, did not throw his equipment over his shoulder and trudge into practice with downcast eyes and a heavy heart.

The former captain of the Albany squad said he was excited to reconnect with players who weren't just his teammates but his close friends.

"It was really good; I have a lot of good friends there," he said.

Gionta was able to sign with the Little Devils in Albany because he was on the team's "clear day" list last spring, which meant he was eligible for last season's AHL playoffs and eligible to sign with the team when the lockout began Sept. 15.

Gionta and his agent, Stephen Bartlett, spoke with Devils GM and president Lou Lamoriello and Lamoriello's son Chris, who manages the Albany squad, about what would be best for Gionta.

All agreed that it would be best to wait and hope for an early resolution to the labor dispute.

It didn't happen and as Gionta candidly pointed out, he doesn't have the financial security of many of his peers. So for financial reasons and to stay game-ready for when (if?) the lockout ends, all parties decided a couple of weeks ago that it was time for Gionta to return to his roots with the Albany Devils

"I couldn't take the financial hit; that definitely played a part in my decision," Gionta said.

Gionta has played in two games thus far and if there was strangeness, it was popping in on the team in midseason as opposed to during training camp

"I think that was the biggest transition for me," he said.

Gionta couldn't be blamed for having thought that these experiences -- the bus rides, along with the quirky schedule of having three AHL games in three nights, sometimes all away from home, aren't out of the norm -- would be a thing of his past.

When Jacob Josefson went down with an injury late in the regular season, Gionta was called up to the NHL and played in the Devils' final regular-season game, scoring the winning goal. Instead of heading back to Albany, Gionta was told he'd be sticking around for the playoffs. Actually, he more than stuck around, forming a dynamic fourth-line unit with Ryan Carter and Steve Bernier that was a catalyst to the Devils' advancing to their first Stanley Cup finals since 2003.

The group forechecked like demons, created turnovers, drew penalties and scored timely goals. It was, until the buzzer sounded in Game 6 of the finals and the Los Angeles Kings celebrated their first-ever Cup championship, a magical spring for Gionta and the Devils.

Nothing was guaranteed, of course, but it's hard to imagine that Gionta wouldn't have found himself on the opening-day roster in October had the lockout not set the hockey world off its axis.

Gionta, who had three goals and four assists in the playoffs, understands that nothing was set in stone. In fact, he relishes the opportunity to prove himself yet again. It's something he has been doing his entire career as an undersized player.

"You always have to prove yourself, to earn your spot," Gionta said. "Your job's always on the line, every season. There's always someone looking to jump right up and take your spot. If you're not ready for it, you're not going to be sharp."

His relationship with the Devils reminds us that in spite of the rancor of the labor dispute and the repeated angry comments and name-calling of commissioner Gary Bettman by some players, in many (if not most) cases, the relationships between players and owners is at least cordial and often much more than that.

The Devils under Lamoriello have long been an organization in which loyalty is more than just a word, but a way of doing business. The Devils took a chance on Brian Gionta with the 82nd overall pick in 1998 and he delivered in spades, helping the Devils to their Stanley Cup in 2003 and scoring a career-best 48 goals in 2005-06. In an interview before the Cup finals, Lamoriello told ESPN.com that had he not developed a relationship with Brian and the Gionta family, the team probably wouldn't have given Stephen Gionta a chance after he left Boston College.

In turn, Stephen has been a loyal foot soldier for the Devils, remaining with the team from the get-go and emerging as a strong leader at the AHL level while biding his time, waiting for an NHL break. That he is back in the AHL hoping that NHL break wasn't just a fleeting moment has done little to shake Gionta's feelings about the Devils.

"The organization's been great to me," he said. "I'm very fortunate for the opportunities that they've given me."

Along with working out with Devils teammates in Newark, Gionta has used his time during the lockout to do more visiting with family. A father of two -- a daughter who just turned 3 and a 10-month-old son -- Gionta has also been able to spend time with Brian and his family.

The two actually played on the same line in a charity game in Cornwall, Ontario.

As for working out at the Devils' practice facility, which is adjacent to the Prudential Center, the team's NHL home, Gionta acknowledged it was strange not using their regular dressing room and facilities, instead using a more spartan dressing room.

"But at the end of the day, you're still there working out with your teammates, guys who are right there with you in the same situation," he said.

Gionta said that the wild ride of the labor talks has been frustrating for the players and also for the team because of the lost opportunity coming off a long, emotional playoff run.

"You want to play so badly, just to see the roller coaster that it's going through, it's tough," Gionta said.

"Hopefully both sides can figure this out sooner than later," he added.

ESPN LOADED: 12.13.2012

646377 Websites

ESPN / 12 things to miss about the NHL

By Scott Burnside

1. The national anthem at the United Center in Chicago

Never fails to raise the hair on your arms. We don't even mind the playing of the Fratellis' ditty "Chelsea Dagger" after every Blackhawks goal and at the end of games.

2. Scott Hartnell's hair

Is there anything more completely hockey than the unruly mop that spills out from under Hartnell's helmet? We also miss the popular fund-raising effort centered on Hartnell's propensity for tumbling all over the ice called "Hartnell Down." One of the game's true characters.

Scott Hartnell

Does anyone in the game have a better head of hair than Scott Hartnell?

3. HBO's "24/7: Road to the Winter Classic" reality series

For the past two years we've enjoyed HBO's unique peek inside the world of pro hockey as a lead-up to the Winter Classic. Often profane but just as often emotional and illuminating, here's hoping it comes back when hockey does to remind us of the machinery that is the game.

4. The Jagr Salute

Surefire Hall of Famer Jaromir Jagr returned to the NHL last season after a three-year self-imposed exile to the Kontinental Hockey League and became an instant favorite both in and out of the Philadelphia dressing room. This season he will, er, would have, delighted fans in Dallas with his trademark post-goal salute.

5. The raconteurs

There's one on every team. Whether it's Mike Rupp in New York or Max Talbot in Philadelphia or Steve Ott in Buffalo, they're the thoughtful, maybe irreverent guys to whom the reporters gravitate after morning skates, practices or games, the guys who understand it's a privilege to be a pro athlete and, at the end of the day, it's just a game.

6. Brendan Shanahan

Seriously. We've spent a lot of time bashing the NHL's Dean of Discipline, but he took the job forward with his video explanations of supplemental discipline and, well, we miss his regular Alfred Hitchcockian appearances that are a constant reminder of the element of mayhem that will always be part of the game.

7. The overachievers

Every season there's a team that shocks the heck out of everyone, including itself, to jump into the postseason fray. Last season, it was the Florida Panthers and St. Louis Blues winning unexpected division titles. Those teams are a treat to be around because there is giddiness in the dressing room that reinforces that all things are possible no matter what (most) experts think.

8. The playoffs

Nothing like it in sport. Sixteen teams in a grueling trail of tears to the most recognizable trophy in all of sport. Can't imagine another spring without the puck dropping on the first round and knowing that somewhere a No. 1 or 2 seed is about to get knocked out of the dance.

Mayan Calendar

The Mayan calendar ends on Dec. 21, 2012. Hopefully, we will have a resolution to labor negotiations before then.

9. Press Boxes

OK, in part because of the snacks like the ice cream bars in Toronto or the hot dogs in Montreal or the cake cart in Boston, but really it's the unexpected collision of scouts and reporters and former players and coaches that NHL press boxes yield. One night you might bump into Scotty Bowman in Tampa or Tom Kurvers in Minnesota or maybe former NHLPA head Paul Kelly in Boston or, well, you get it. Every press box represents a different community but a community nonetheless.

10. Tim Thomas

Yeah, the former Vezina and Conn Smythe Trophy winner took it on the chin last season for his sometimes curious political/religious musings, but Thomas remains the gold standard for never give up, never take no for an answer. Who knew his stepping away from the game would coincide with the game stepping away from the game?

11. Coaches

Yeah, you can call up a coach during the lockout, but it's not the same as a coach when he's actually coaching. To sit in Dan Bylsma's office or hang out in a hallway after practice with Ken Hitchcock or Pete DeBoer or Bruce Boudreau is to be given a special window seat on the game. We miss also those coaches who are less tolerant of the media, guys like John Tortorella, Randy Carlyle and Darryl Sutter, because even in their occasional curtness there are stories to be told and lessons to be learned.

12. Erik Karlsson

And every young player like him who takes the game by the suspenders, shakes it around a bit and says, "Hey, we're here." I remember talking about the eventual Norris Trophy winner from the Ottawa Senators with a scout who said what impressed him the most about Karlsson was that you had to watch him every shift because every shift he did something that raised your eyebrows. He's not the only one, but we miss them all.

ESPN LOADED: 12.13.2012

646378 Websites

ESPN / Eurzione not looking to cash in

By John Buccigross

Mike Eruzione's jersey from the famous game against the Soviets is on the block.

One 30-foot wrist shot with a wooden stick can take you a long way. Even if that shot is wired in little Lake Placid, N.Y.

For Mike Eruzione, his 30-foot twisted wrister versus the Soviet Union in the 1980 Winter Olympics took him from Winthrop, Mass., to the White House, and into the pages of sporting history as the man who scored the gamewinning goal in what turned out to be, to many, the biggest sporting moment of the 20th century.

And while that one shining moment when a group of young, carefree, excitable American boys vanquished a group of older, dour Communists

took Eruzione places, it didn't make him McMansion wealthy nor immune to the vagaries of capitalism.

And so everything in Mike Eruzione's musty hockey bag, except his gold medal and Olympic ring, are up for sale. The white No. 21 USA jersey he wore to beat the Soviet Union, the blue jersey he wore to win gold against Finland, and the stick he used for his Mark Messier-like left skate wrist shot that proved miraculous and life changing.

But wait, there's more, as we will find out. The auction will be held in late February around the anniversary of the various 1980 Olympic moments. Heritage Auction House of Dallas will run the auction. The big media push will begin in January, but Eruzione gave ESPN.com this exclusive interview to explain why.

This is not the first time a member of the 1980 USA Olympic hockey team has sold memorabilia. Mark Wells developed a genetic disease that attacked his spinal cord discs, so he sold his gold medal for \$40,000, which turned out to be far below market value. The Connecticut collector then turned around in September 2010 and sold Wells' medal in auction for \$310,000. I was recently told Steve Christoff has sold his gold medal. Ken Morrow sold his Soviet-worn jersey for \$104,000 before auction fees. His game-worn gloves went for \$6,000. Heritage Auction House is hoping, as is Eruzione, that his take will be at least well more than a million dollars.

Bucci: Why are you doing this?

Eruzione: It's something I've thought about for the last couple of years after hearing Paul Henderson sold his jersey from the 1972 Summit Series for \$1.2 million. When I heard that, I thought, "Wow, what a great opportunity this is to sell my memorabilia and give some money back to my family, my kids, my grandson." I've got some ideas with what I want to do with the money. I will be more specific closer to the auction. Fortunately, I don't need the money to help me. I've done very well over the last 32 years and hopefully will continually do well in the future with appearances. I'm not broke! I'm not doing this for my own purpose or gain; in fact, it's not for my purpose at all. I think I can do a lot of good for others with what I get. My first grandson, Michael, was born a week ago. I've thought about his future and the cost of tuition for my daughter and things like that. My daughter, Leigh Ann, is a social worker and her husband is a detective; my older son, Michael, manages apartment buildings; and my younger son, Paul, recently got his first job as a graphic designer.

Bucci: What are you selling, and is it a package deal?

Eruzione: For now, it's all separate items. The stick that I scored the winning goal against the Soviet Union, the jersey from the Soviet game, the jersey from the Finland game, my cowboy hat, the warmup suit I wore on the podium, my gloves, my shoulder pads, my opening ceremony outfit and my sweatsuit that I tried out for the team in at the Olympic festival are among the items.

Bucci: What about the gold medal?

Eruzione: It will not be sold. It's the ultimate thing. The gold medal will never be sold as long as I'm alive. If something happens to me and my kids/grandkids want to do something with it, hopefully it's for the right reasons.

Bucci: What piece do the auction people feel will be the most valuable?

Eruzione: The Soviet Union game jersey. The opening bid is a million dollars. Then the Finnish jersey. They are also bullish about the podium sweatsuit that I wore.

Bucci: What kind of person do you want purchasing the items? Do you care?

Eruzione: I do care. I hope it's somebody that cherishes the moment and understands that it isn't just a sporting event, it's a piece of history. The auction people think a person might buy it that has never bought a sports memorabilia piece in their life. They might get someone who buys it and donates it to the Smithsonian. I hope someone buys it that appreciates it as much as I did and feels they have a part of American history.

Bucci: It is emotional or stressful to part with this stuff?

Eruzione: No, not at all. The stuff was in my attic sitting inside my original equipment bag from 1980. It is was the medal that would be different. That would be hard to deal with. It's equipment that means a lot to me but to share things is not bad either and to generate income for the causes that I will announce later it just made sense. I was concerned with the perception. I asked Jack Parker about it and asked what he thought about it. He

responded, "Good for you." That was the turning point for me. If he would have said, "I think you're making a big mistake," I would have hesitated. My friends and teammates have all been supportive. I've talked with Jack O'Callahan and Robby McClanahan, and sent a text to every guy on the team, and not one of my teammates objected. In fact, they are curious what the stuff will go for and you might soon see more of them do the same thing with their stuff. I am 100 percent comfortable. I am concerned with the public's perception but I think people will come to understand why I'm doing it

Bucci: I understand Mario Lemieux called and offered to buy your Soviet Union game jersey?

Eurzione: Yeah, Mario offered me 100 bucks for my jersey. And my buddy, the kicker Robby Gould, offered to me a couple more strokes on the golf course

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646379 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Spector on CBA: Owners need to budge

Mark Spector

NEW YORK - If we have not watched a lot of hockey this laborious fall, we have at least become far more learned in the ways of collective bargaining.

Today's post-work beer is consumed amid conversation of decertification and disclaim of interest, not goals and assists; today a hockey writer's road trip to New York comes sans puck and morning skate. Instead it is spent wearing a groove in one's Blackberry while trying (and eventually succeeding) at locating where the event is that you've been sent here to cover.

And so it was at No. 517, US Highway 1 South, right next to the Renaissance hotel in Iselin, N.J. that the only two teams that hockey has given us this season were sniffed out by reporters before they'd even broken for lunch on Tuesday.

Seriously. In a city the size of New York, there were two places that every hockey writer worth his Marriott pen had spitballed as the "undisclosed location" where the National Hockey League, its Players' Association, and federal mediator Scot L. Beckenbaugh might meet on Wednesday:

They were the Marriott hotel at Newark Liberty International Airport, where quick flights in and out are handy, and the Woodbridge, N.J. regional office of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

Incredibly, the NHL and NHLPA picked one of those -- thank goodness for our side -- and by lunch break there was a small posse of reporters and TV cameras there.

To report on their (ahem) progress.

"The parties were actually never in the same room together," deputy commissioner Bill Daly said after the mediation. "We did several different caucuses, meetings rooms... Really, there's nothing new to report."

"The mediator probed on both sides, but nothing new -- or old -- is on the table right now," he later added in an email. "More in the nature of 'what ifs?"

In the end, the league put last week's offer back on the table. You know, the one Gary Bettman said was off the table?

"It wasn't much of a decision," Brendan Morrison said as he exited the meetings.

So, while we would rather find out if Jason Garrison was money well spent by the Vancouver Canucks, or if the Leafs are truly going to get Roberto Luongo, we receive instead another lesson on mediation and the NHL. Oil and water.

It doesn't work, because a mediator can only work his magic if both parties are willing participants in the process. (The league is not). Also, the less familiar the two sides are with each other's needs and wishes, the more successful mediators tend to be.

Neither of those tenets of mediation work for commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr, two men who know intimately each other's business needs and wants. In fact, though the NHLPA requested that the mediator re-engage in this standoff, we are firm in the belief that it was like a trip to the dentist for Bettman.

The NHL walked away from last week's meetings after having given the union three demands: their preferred CBA length, no buy-outs or cap on escrow, and "the hill (they) will die on," a five-year contract limit. When Fehr answered those demands with further negotiation, rather than utter compliance, Bettman walked.

That same "offer" was back on the table Wednesday in New Jersey, and once again, it was summarily dismissed by the players.

Let's face it: Bettman does not require a mediator to show him where middle ground lies. Bettman knows where it is. He just does not want to go there.

"There has to be compromise by them," texted Shawn Horcoff, who has been an active participant in these negotiations, but was not in New Jersey Wednesday. "If they aren't willing to move, we won't either.

"Players feel like they've done all the moving. They continually want us to come to them while giving us little in return."

To think that this attempt at mediation would have greater impact than in 2004-05 -- when the season was officially cancelled three days after the mediator walked -- was naïve.

So we're done now, with multiple different owners, with legions of players coming to the meetings, and twice now, with mediation.

It is up to the NHL now, to decide when it wants to play.

How important are games on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day? Move off your "hill to die on" and the players will move too.

Horcoff is right. The players have moved more.

It is Bettman's turn now.

Your move, Gary.

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