

# SPORT-SCAN DAILY BRIEF

NHL 12/16/2012

## Anaheim Ducks

646536 Gary Bettman remains a stern guy in labor talks  
646537 Players to vote on dissolving union as tactic to have lockout declared illegal

## Buffalo Sabres

646538 Spirit of 76: Quick fix with look back at Mogilny's monster year  
646539 NHL season still salvageable

## Chicago Blackhawks

646540 NHL players to vote on whether board can dissolve union

## Colorado Avalanche

646541 Denver Cutthroats veteran Brad Smyth is Crash Davis of hockey

## Columbus Blue Jackets

646542 Michael Arace commentary: Blue Jackets fans might never get to know Aucoin

## Dallas Stars

646543 Will NHL players dissolve their union? We'll know on Sunday  
646544 Stardate: Dec. 15, 2001 - Modano's sixth straight game with a goal is a rout  
646545 NHL players to vote on dissolving union

## Detroit Red Wings

646546 With tactics coming to a head, fate of NHL season will be known soon

## Edmonton Oilers

646547 NHL Lockout: NHL's class action complaint almost identical to NBA's, but the differences are illuminating  
646548 Edmonton Oilers Devon Dubnyk exploring his overseas playing options  
646549 World Juniors a confidence builder for Edmonton Oilers Taylor Hall  
646550 World Junior was 'a coming out party' for Edmonton Oilers Jordan Eberle  
646551 Second time lucky for Edmonton Oilers Devan Dubnyk with Team Canada  
646552 Ryan Nugent-Hopkins finally living the World Juniors dream

## Los Angeles Kings

646553 Bob Miller (Part 2...of 3)

## Minnesota Wild

646554 NHL seeking to void contracts if players go 'disclaimer of interest' route

## Nashville Predators

646555 Frustrated Predators fans turn to high school hockey

## New Jersey Devils

646556 Players to Vote on Whether Board Can Dissolve Union  
646557 Devils' Matt Corrente out for season after shoulder surgery  
646558 NHL fears Fehr itself

## New York Islanders

646559 NHL lockout hurting Coliseum-area businesses

## Ottawa Senators

646560 Ottawa Senators face wrath of angry fans

## Philadelphia Flyers

646561 Inside the Flyers: What would shortened NHL season look like?  
646562 Sports in Brief: NHL union to vote on dissolving  
646563 NHL lunacy gets worse

## Pittsburgh Penguins

646564 Penguins prospect Morrow a work in progress  
646565 Penguins, players keep true to spirit of giving  
646566 NHL Labor: De-certification vote starts today

## St Louis Blues

646567 If and when the NHL lockout ends, what then?

## Tampa Bay Lightning

646568 Vinik gives Lightning employees early holiday gift

## Toronto Maple Leafs

646569 From the Lip: Ilya Bryzgalov is spending the NHL lockout in space, or something

## Vancouver Canucks

646570 Sedin Twins surprise Vancouver Thunderbirds Triple A Midget team by showing up for practice (video)

## Washington Capitals

646571 Adam Oates's debut as Washington Capitals coach is on hold during NHL lockout

## Websites

646572 NBCSports.com /No surprise: NHL and NHLPA not expected to talk this weekend  
646573 NBCSports.com /Players to begin voting Sunday to give authority to dissolve union  
646574 NBCSports.com /NHL will argue contracts are null and void if union decertifies  
646575 Sportsnet.ca / Spector on lockout: Sad state of affairs  
SPORT-SCAN, INC. 941-284-4129  
646536 Anaheim Ducks

Gary Bettman remains a stern guy in labor talks

By Helene Elliott

When Gary Bettman becomes irate, spots of color bloom near his cheekbones and his body vibrates like a taut wire. And rarely has the NHL commissioner appeared as angry as he was on Dec. 6, after the league broke off collective bargaining talks with the players' association and he was asked how he feels about presiding over his third lockout in 20 years.

"It's absolutely something that torments me," he said, biting off the words as his complexion took on the reddish color of his tie.

Yet, most fans and players don't believe he's troubled by the discord that has postponed the start of the 2012-13 season at least through Dec. 30. Nor do they trust him and his strategy.

They've read the NHL's news releases about revenues reaching a record \$3.3 billion last season and wonder how the league can be in such peril now. The last lockout was defensible because of league-wide losses, and although Bettman became the first commissioner of a major North American sport to cancel a season over a labor dispute, he won major concessions. The players' union splintered and Bettman got an economic overhaul anchored by a salary cap in addition to fan-friendly changes on the ice.

This dispute feels different. Some teams are making piles of money and many have signed players to contracts that are double-digit-years in length and triple-digit-millions in payout. But Bettman sees costs rising and fears for the mid- and small-market teams, and he feels obliged to protect them.

Owners deemed it insupportable when players' salaries last season consumed 57% of hockey-related revenues, money contractually defined to be shared. After making a severe initial offer that seemed only to rally players around NHL Players' Assn. leader Donald Fehr, Bettman locked players out Sept. 15. "We believe we're paying out too much," he said.

How much is too much? Whatever the owners say it is.

Bettman works for them, and they've shown their approval of him by extending his contract and paying him nearly \$8 million in salary and benefits for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2011. Some big-market clubs have pressured him to forge a deal and start an abbreviated season, but he's holding firm on three issues: a 10-year collective bargaining agreement (with an opt-out after eight years); a five-year maximum for players' contracts except teams can re-sign free agents for seven years, and no buyouts as the next labor deal is phased in.

"It certainly appears as an observer of these things that the league is taking a very strong-willed approach in these negotiations, and I suppose folks shouldn't be too surprised because of the similar approach in the labor stoppage the NHL had in 2004," said Seth Borden, a labor lawyer and partner at the New York office of McKenna Long & Aldridge who said he's a sports fan but doesn't know Bettman personally.

The deal that ended the 2004-05 dispute, initially considered a win for the NHL, was undermined when owners doled out long, front-loaded contracts that minimized salary-cap hits. This time, Bettman is intent on closing all loopholes and saving the owners from themselves. He already gave them a huge victory when players accepted a 50-50 split of hockey-related revenues throughout the next agreement.

"He's got his marching orders. He knows what he wants to achieve on behalf of his folks," Borden said. "He has taken a very aggressive approach in trying to achieve those objectives."

Bettman, 60, inarguably excels at the business of hockey.

"He's brilliant. He's mastered the breadth of the industry, and it's a broad industry, with lots of detail," said Toronto Maple Leafs General Manager Brian Burke, who was Bettman's top hockey deputy from 1993 to '98.

"He communicates wonderfully with the owners. That's a big part of his job. He's probably on the phone with 10 different owners every day. He was very fair when I worked for him. A born teacher."

But the knowledge and assurance that make Bettman an effective businessman make him an unsympathetic figure to players, fans and those who have emotional investments in the game.

Owners can be reclusive, but Bettman is out front and an easy target. A New Jersey resident who speaks with the accent of his native Queens, Bettman isn't warm and fuzzy. He's sharply intelligent and can come off as cold. Some Canadians resent that he didn't learn the game in Moose Jaw or Toronto and insist he can't have the good of their game at heart.

Bettman declined an interview with The Times, saying he didn't want his comments to affect the labor talks. Those who know him say he has a human side and has been wronged in the court of public opinion.

"I wish Gary was perceived more fairly than he is in Canada because he's a great guy, a brilliant guy, and he's really been good for our league," Burke said. "You have to look at the metrics of this league from when Gary took over to where we are now, and he's been a marvelous commissioner."

Jonathon Gatehouse, a senior correspondent for Canada's Maclean's magazine, set out to write a book to coincide with the 20th anniversary of Bettman's 1993 ascent. "The Instigator: How Gary Bettman Remade the NHL and Changed the Game Forever," is an unauthorized biography, but Gatehouse had access to Bettman and the commissioner's current and former colleagues.

"I think he's a far more complex figure than the sort of cartoon that exists in the minds of most fans," Gatehouse said. "He knows a lot more about the game than people generally give him credit for."

"I think what's problematic about him is what you're seeing right now, that as a commissioner you can talk about the good of the game and concepts like that, but in the end it's a business and he's there to maximize profits for owners. That's what he's there for and that's what he's good at."

Bettman got his formal education at Cornell University and New York University law school. His education accelerated when he worked alongside NBA Commissioner David Stern, a fellow alumnus of the New York law firm Proskauer Rose who knew of him through their mutual mentor, George Gallantz. Stern hired Bettman to be the NBA's assistant general counsel, and in that role Bettman codified the complex salary cap while following Stern's hard-nosed lead in labor talks.

"As a negotiator I'm much gentler and easier than Gary — but put that in quotes so nobody misunderstands. "Said with a chuckle," Stern said, supplying his own punctuation during a phone interview.

Bettman was on the NHL's radar after John Ziegler was forced out as the league's president in 1992. Then-Kings owner Bruce McNall, leading the search, targeted Stern and Stern's deputy, Russ Granik. After both declined, the NHL chose Bettman over self-promoting Gil Stein to become its first commissioner.

The fit seemed good. After 12 years at the NBA Bettman was only 40. Best of all, Bettman, who stands about 5 feet 7, seemed to have a sense of humor.

"I don't think I have to be a hockey guy," he said at his first news conference. "I wasn't hired to be a general manager. I certainly wasn't hired to be a coach. And certainly not as a player."

NHL executives liked Bettman's experience with the NBA's salary cap because they wanted one too. He didn't get it in his first labor conflict, which shortened the 1994-95 season to 48 games, but he made good use of the expertise he had gained while handling the NBA's legal, entertainment, licensing, TV and international matters.

"There was no area he didn't work on with Russ and me," said Stern, who socializes often with Bettman. "The three of us would just sort of finish each other's sentences and worked very hard to do it. Gary was incapable of being overloaded by work. He was indefatigable and always happy to take on new responsibilities."

Bettman, installed on Feb. 1, 1993, inherited a league that had annual revenues of \$400 million and little national TV presence. Recruiting and supervising a staff that generated innovations in marketing, online ventures and events such as the Winter Classic, Bettman helped the NHL attract an impressive array of corporate sponsors.

He negotiated TV deals with Fox for five years at \$155 million and later a five-year, \$600-million deal with ABC in 1998 that was renewed for two years at less money. Although the NHL split with ABC/ESPN after its lost season, the league benefited from media mergers that moved its U.S. telecasts from the little-known Outdoor Life Network to NBC/Comcast. The network agreed to a 10-year, \$2-billion rights deal last year.

Gatehouse called Bettman arguably "the most powerful figure the game's ever known" above even the Norris family, which owned several teams in the old six-team NHL.

"It's a far different business, dollar-wise, in reach and professionalism," Gatehouse said. "It's a major enterprise and he has largely formed it, and he has also formed not just the game you see on the ice but how it's marketed and how people consume it."

Bettman has also influenced where it's consumed.

Although expansion was in the works before he took over, he is identified with the NHL's foray into the Sunbelt. He has been — perhaps beyond reason — a staunch supporter of the Phoenix Coyotes, who were placed in bankruptcy more than three years ago and are still being operated by the league. But he was quick to help move the Atlanta Thrashers to Winnipeg, where they enjoyed a spectacular debut last season.

His support of nontraditional cities has contributed to the venom spewed at him during this dispute. Fans have created websites, circulated petitions and manufactured T-shirts calling for Bettman's dismissal. Others hurl profanity or make veiled threats via social media. He tries not to flinch publicly.

"He handles it as well as anyone possibly could," Stern said. "He understands that comes with the job, as we all do.... That's why it's important that you believe in what you're doing and have the support of your owners and you know that's what they expect you to do."

Continuing his pattern, Bettman's latest move was a bold one. Anticipating the NHLPA would take the legal path of dissolving as a union, the NHL on Friday filed a class-action complaint in federal court in New York seeking a

declaration confirming that its lockout is legal. The NHL also filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board alleging the union "engaged in an unlawful subversion of the collective bargaining process and conduct that constitutes bad faith bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act."

Still, the season isn't necessarily lost. The National Basketball Players Assn. filed a disclaimer of interest during its dispute with the NBA last year. The sides settled soon afterward. There's still time for a 56- or 58-game season starting in mid-January if Bettman and the owners conclude they've gained enough from players.

"I still suspect that the league has in its mind a break-even point financially, and if it's not a date on a calendar or a particular number of games lost, or whatever, it's some metric by which they know, 'Hey, we're about to pass the point of no return,'" said Borden, the labor lawyer.

"And again, not knowing the full ins and outs of the economics of the league, I would find it hard to believe that they're willing to give up on an entire season. Although each week that passes makes it seem more possible, I just don't think that is as an attractive prospect as it might have been in 2004 in order to achieve their objectives."

LA Times: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646537 Anaheim Ducks

Players to vote on dissolving union as tactic to have lockout declared illegal

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TORONTO – NHL players will begin voting Sunday on whether they will grant the players' association's executive board the authority to dissolve the union because of the inability to reach a collective bargaining agreement with the league.

Two-thirds of the union's membership must vote in favor of allowing the executive board to file a "disclaimer of interest," a source told The Canadian Press on Saturday. Votes will be cast electronically over a five-day period that ends Thursday. If the measure passes, the 30-member executive board would have until Jan. 2 to file the disclaimer.

Article Tab: image1-Players to vote on dissolving union as tactic to have lockout declared illegal

The union is taking steps toward breaking up even after the NHL started a legal challenge against it.

On Friday, the NHL filed a class-action complaint which asked a federal court in New York to make a declaration on the legality of the lockout.

In the 43-page complaint, the league argued the players' association was only considering the "disclaimer of interest" to "extract more favorable terms and conditions of employment."

"The union has threatened to pursue this course not because it is defunct or otherwise incapable of representing NHL players for purposes of collective bargaining, nor because NHL players are dissatisfied with the representation they have been provided by the NHLPA," the NHL complaint said. "The NHLPA's threatened decertification or disclaimer is nothing more than an impermissible negotiating tactic, which the union incorrectly believes would enable it to commence an antitrust challenge to the NHL's lockout."

The NHL also filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

The union issued a statement on Friday night that claimed the league overstepped its bounds.

"The NHL appears to be arguing that players should be stopped from even considering their right to decide whether or not to be represented by a union," the statement said. "We believe that their position is completely without merit."

By filing the class-action complaint in New York, the league guaranteed that the legality of the lockout would be decided in a court known to be sympathetic toward management. If the NHLPA dissolves it will seek to

have the lockout deemed illegal — something that could result in players being paid triple their lost salary in damages if successful.

Despite the focus of the lockout shifting from the board room to the courtroom, there is nothing preventing the sides from continuing to try to negotiate with each another. They met separately over two days with a U.S. federal mediator this week in New Jersey but failed to make any progress. No further talks are scheduled

Just eight years after becoming the first North American professional sports league to lose an entire season to a labor dispute, the NHL is in danger of repeating it.

Players have already missed five paychecks during the lockout that will enter its 14th week on Sunday. More than 500 regular-season games through Dec. 30 have been wiped off the schedule.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646538 Buffalo Sabres

Spirit of 76: Quick fix with look back at Mogilny's monster year

Sick of all this legalese and need a quick hockey fix?

NHL.com has been doing a series of stories on the 20th anniversary of the 1992-93 season, which it has noted as one of the more fascinating campaigns -- and perhaps even the best -- in recent league history.

Today's subject? The 76-goal season of Sabres Hall of Famer Alexander Mogilny.

Mogilny had 76 goals, 51 assists and 127 points that year playing alongside Pat LaFontaine (who finished at 53-95-148!). And the team thus had some crazy outbursts: There was a 12-3 win over Ottawa in October, an 11-6 destruction of the Rangers on New Year's Eve and a 10-7 win on Feb. 24 over Detroit, the night Mogilny broke Danny Gare's club record with his 57th goal.

It was also the season of the MayDay goal that completed the sweep of Boston in the playoffs. But Mogilny and LaFontaine were both hobbled in the next round and the Sabres were swept in four one-goal games -- three in overtime -- by Montreal. The Canadiens went on to win the Stanley Cup, leaving a great what-if lingering in Sabres history.

NHL.com also did a story as part of its '92-93 package on the LaFontaine line itself. Now, it's obvious the league's official site is trying to deflect attention from the lockout with all this stuff but sometimes that's OK too.

Cue the memory banks and roll the highlight films on Mogilny and LaFontaine here.

---Mike Harrington

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.16.2012

646539 Buffalo Sabres

NHL season still salvageable

Leo Roth

With the NHL player's lockout past the 90-day mark, it's beginning to look a lot like 2004-05, when the entire season was put on ice.

I'm here to tell you, though, it's not panic time yet by any means.

In 1994-95, a lockout that season didn't end until Jan. 11. A week later, a 48-game season ensued, with New Jersey sweeping Detroit for the Stanley Cup just as beaches were opening. In other words, hockey fans can chill. We've got a month to play with and deadlines have a way of making people work harder and faster.

Yes, I'm aware the entire 2004-05 season was lost, but the big issue then, a salary cap, was a much harder puck to crack.

The NHL has never been more popular, as evidenced by last season's record \$3.4 billion in total revenues. The golden goose (Canada goose?) is just too fat to kill today, so whatever issues need to be bridged between owners and players — a 50/50 split of revenues, five-year individual contract lengths, a 10-year CBA — the skate to the middle should be a short one.

Each day the lockout lingers, owners lose money, players lose money, and well, lots of little guys lose money. Business for bars and restaurants near NHL arenas in Canada reportedly is off 35 percent and provincial sports books are out millions.

But has the game already been hurt irreparably? Please.

If past labor disputes in sports have taught us anything, it's that absence only makes the heart grow fonder. Any backlash from fans is only short term. We need our games, our vestiges of escape and communal bonding, high-fiving with strangers as beer gets spilled down your back.

We need our sports heroes — and they don't stop coming.

Reports this week that Reebok's CCM Hockey label has signed 15-year-old phenom Connor McDavid of Newmarket, Ontario, to a multiyear, multimillion endorsement deal should silence concerns about the NHL's ability to survive moving forward.

"We are not in the habit of signing kids that age, but there are special occurrences and this is one," Reebok/CCM vice president of global marketing Glen Thornborough told Sports Business Journal.

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Democrat and Chronicle LOADED: 12.16.2012

646540 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL players to vote on whether board can dissolve union

Reuters

Locked out NHL players will begin voting on Sunday on whether to give the players association's executive board authority to file a "disclaimer of interest" and dissolve their union.

Voting will be done electronically and continue through Thursday, a source familiar with the proceedings told Reuters on Saturday.

A two-thirds majority will be needed to give the 30-member executive board the power to file a "disclaimer of interest" that would disband the union and free players to file anti-trust suits with the courts.

The NHLPA has not yet said it plans to file the disclaimer but could go that route if negotiations remained stalled.

The league moved to prevent the NHLPA from decertifying on Friday, filing a class action complaint against the players' union.

The NHL asked U.S. courts to confirm the legality of the lockout and simultaneously filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

NBA and NFL players pursued similar courses in 2011 labor disputes with their leagues before new collective bargaining agreements were eventually reached.

The legal maneuvering follows two unsuccessful days of bargaining with U.S. federal mediators trying to jump start stalled talks on a new collective bargaining agreement.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has said he cannot see the league, which normally runs an 82-game regular season, playing less than a 48-game campaign. But with games through December, 42.8 percent of the schedule, already canceled, time is quickly running out for salvaging even a partial season.

The two sides appear to have inched closer on the main sticking point of how to divide \$3.3 billion in revenue.

The league is seeking an immediate 50-50 split while players, who will see their share chopped from 57 percent, want the cuts brought in gradually with a "make whole" provision in place to cover money that would be lost on current contracts.

Several other contentious items remain on the table, including the length of a new collective bargaining agreement, contract limits, drug testing and continued participation in the Winter Olympics.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 12.16.2012

646541 Colorado Avalanche

Denver Cutthroats veteran Brad Smyth is Crash Davis of hockey

By Adrian Dater

Brad Smyth has played on the same line with Wayne Gretzky. He is an original member of the Nashville Predators. He has played for five teams in the past six years — each in a different country. In 20 seasons of professional hockey in 12 leagues, he has played 1,307 games for 21 teams — not including two or three stints with several of them.

But get this: Smyth, a.k.a. the "Crash Davis" of hockey, may have finally found a home.

"This could be where I really start thinking about the future, laying down some roots," Smyth said. "I'm really happy here right now. But I've learned for sure: You never get too comfortable in this business."

Smyth, 39, is a player and assistant coach with the expansion Denver Cutthroats of the Central Hockey League, playing for his best friend — coach Derek Armstrong — whom he has known since they were kids growing up in Ottawa.

Smyth has fast become beloved in the Cutthroats' dressing room, where some teammates who were just toddlers when he began his pro career

revel in his stories, some including life in "The Show" that was his 88-game NHL career.

"Me, him and (A.J.) Gale, we drive together to the rink a lot, and we grill him all the time, like 'Tell us this story, tell us that story,'" said Cutthroats forward Troy Schwab, 27, who plays on the same line as Smyth and Gale. "The guy has a million stories. He's played everywhere. The first time I met him, I ask him, 'You played with Gretzky?' and he goes, 'Yep, first shift with Gretz, same line.' I mean, how many guys can say that?"

Asked to recount the story, Smyth said: "It was in Washington (April 14, 1988, with the New York Rangers), right at the end of the year. The Rangers had had a bad year and were way out of the playoffs, and you wouldn't blame a guy like Gretzky maybe not being all that interested in playing that game or in playing with a call-up like me.

"But right away, he came up to me

and talked about some things we could try maybe together and was really focused. It showed me so much what being a pro is all about, and I've tried to have that same commitment no matter where I've been or at what level."

The CHL arguably is the lowest level of pro hockey in Smyth's long career. Most players make only a few hundred dollars a week, though their living arrangements and health insurance are covered by their teams. Only on rare occasions do teams fly to games. Busing back and forth hundreds of miles at a time is normal. While attendance for Cutthroats games has been decent through its first couple of months in Denver, with crowds at times reaching more than 5,000, there have been nights such as last Tuesday against Rapid City when just a few hundred souls were inside the 60-year-old Denver Coliseum.

Still loves the game

Smyth thought he might retire as a player last year, after a season in France. But one day he got a call from Armstrong, his friend and former teammate with the Hartford (Conn.) Wolf Pack back in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

"I asked him if he'd come play for me. I wasn't too sure at first. You know, maybe he just didn't want to play for an expansion team and ride the buses in the CHL. But he wanted to, and I'm so happy he did. He's been great for us," Armstrong said.

Anyone who might have thought Smyth was a charity signing by his buddy was quickly disabused of the notion. Entering this weekend's games, Smyth ranked second among the Cutthroats in scoring with 13 goals and 29 points in 23 games. Though he also acts as an assistant to Armstrong and has been promised the chance of an expanded coaching role in the future, Smyth is looking at playing at least one more season. And who knows? Maybe more.

"I still like to play. That's the bottom line," said Smyth, who is paid more than the CHL's minimum salary of \$390 per week for players with his experience, but he would not say how much more. "No one gets rich off playing in the Central League. But I still love coming to the rink and the camaraderie of the boys in the dressing room. We've got a great bunch of guys here. They've kept me feeling young."

Smyth's

hockey smarts are evident. Though never blessed with the fastest skating or most ability, he still gets to the puck first more often than not. He knows how to curl off a check and still keep possession of the puck, or be ready for a pass and a quick one-timer around the net. He has never been shy about putting pucks on net, hence his nickname, "Shooter."

"He's always out there willing to teach us younger guys too," said Gale, 25, the Cutthroats' leading scorer with 31 points. "We get a lot of laughs out of him too. His pants are hiked up a little too high and his visor's tilted a little too much and his sticks have a little too much tape on them. He's got tape hanging all over his body."

Smyth, walking past Gale at that moment, was quick with a retort: "'Galer', he's got one of the hardest shots in the league, and one of the hardest heads."

Like the "Crash Davis" character made famous in "Bull Durham" — in that case a career minor-league baseball player — Smyth talks of his time in "The Show" with a mix of reverence and a tinge of regret. He played 88 NHL games for five teams, his final 12 coming with his hometown Ottawa Senators in 2002-03, a time he describes as the happiest of his career.

Why weren't there more games in the NHL, especially for a guy who tore up the AHL with scoring seasons such as 68 goals in 68 games for the Carolina Monarchs in 1995-96 and 50 with the Wolf Pack in 2000-01? He was the AHL's most valuable player in 1995-96.

"I think teams wanted him to be a top-six forward, but if the numbers aren't there right away, then they stick you down to a third and fourth line, and I don't think Brad fit quite in that role as easy then. He was a scorer," Armstrong said.

Some thrills in NHL

Smyth's first NHL team was the 1995-96 Florida Panthers — the one that played the Avalanche for the Stanley Cup. In parts of two seasons with Florida, Smyth played 15 games, with two goals and one assist. His first game came in Buffalo, with Dominik Hasek in net for the Sabres.

"What a thrill, stepping on the ice for the first shift of your first NHL game," Smyth said.

In the seven games he played for the 1995-96 Panthers, he scored his first NHL goal against Chicago Blackhawks goalie Ed Belfour at the United Center. "We were on a 5-on-3, and I just kind of swatted in a rebound around the crease. I still have the puck framed," said Smyth, who lives at a Denver apartment complex with his wife of seven years, Jackie, and their black Labrador.

After making the Panthers out of training camp in 1996 and playing eight games, he was traded to Los Angeles for a third-round pick. For a while, Smyth thought he might find a home with the Kings. He played 44 games and scored eight goals and had 16 points. He made the team out of camp in 1997 and scored three goals in his first nine games, then was traded to the Rangers for "future considerations."

"That was probably my lowest moment," Smyth said.

With the Rangers, he knew he would likely spend most of his time with their farm team in Hartford. He was right.

The Rangers traded him to Nashville in 1998, and despite having only a two-way contract, he made the team out of training camp and played in the franchise's first game at the old Gaylord Entertainment Center. Could this become a new home? No, he soon found out.

After three games, he was back in the minors with Nashville, which a year later traded him back to the Rangers. His last shot in the NHL were those 12 games in Ottawa in 2002-03. Since 2006, he has been on something of a "European Tour," playing for teams in Germany, Austria, Northern Ireland, Italy and France, knowing the NHL isn't calling anymore.

"In Germany one year, the owner gave us all BMWs to have during the season. You should have seen some of those rides to practice and back on the autobahn," Smyth said. "I've gotten to do a lot of amazing things. I'm not bitter at all. I've had a great life. And I'm still getting to do it."

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Wish you were here: Postcards along the way

Brad Smyth's career is as much a Fodor travelogue as a hockey timeline. It includes an incredible 21 different professional teams, not including a few which he played for two or three times. We played a game of word association from each stop with Smyth on a recent day off at the Denver Coliseum, home of his latest hockey team, the CHL's Cutthroats.

1995-96: Carolina Monarchs, AHL

"Tar Heel country. Unbelievable race cars. Good college town."

1996-97: Florida Panthers, NHL

"We were in Miami then. Great weather, great scenery."

1996-98: Los Angeles Kings, NHL

"Always something going on, but very relaxing place to play. I got free tickets to the Lakers — nice bonus."

1997-98: New York Rangers, NHL

"Unbelievable arena, Madison Square Garden tough to beat. Got to play a shift with Gretzky my one game that year."

1998-99: Nashville Predators, NHL

"Well, great live music, right? Great ribs."

2002-03: Ottawa Senators, NHL

"Great team, great experience playing for hometown team. Real hockey country."

2006-09: Hamburg (Germany) Freezers

"Scenic city. Good beer."

2010-11: Belfast (Northern Ireland) Giants

"Really historic city. Good hockey tradition, which most people don't know."

2010-11: Fassa (Italy)

"Great food, great skiing."

2012-13: Denver Cutthroats, CHL

"Best city ever. Awesome sports town, especially our team."

Smyth bio

Age: 39

Birthplace: Ottawa, Ontario.

Career facts: Has played in 12 different pro hockey leagues for 21 teams. ... Currently ranks 29th on the all-time American Hockey League scoring list (667 points in 610 games), he was the AHL's MVP in 1995-96 with Carolina. ... Played 88 NHL games for Florida, New York Rangers, Nashville, Los Angeles and Ottawa. First NHL game was Feb. 25, 1996, for Florida, in Buffalo. ... First NHL goal came March 11, 1996, for Florida at United Center in Chicago against the Blackhawks' Ed Belfour. ... Parents are retired school teachers. ... He has one sibling, brother Greg, who lives in Hong Kong. ... Has been married for seven years to wife, Jackie.

Denver Post: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646542 Columbus Blue Jackets

Michael Arace commentary: Blue Jackets fans might never get to know Aucoin

The senior member of your Blue Jackets is 39 years old. He has played more than 1,000 NHL games for six teams over 16 seasons. He once held the record for most power-play goals in a season by a defenseman, was an All-Star and his slap shot has been measured at 102.2 mph. Can you name him?

Adrian Aucoin has yet to play a game in a Jackets jersey and, with the way the lockout is going, he might not get the chance. That is a sad thing to contemplate, that we might never have the chance to meet him properly, in skates and pads. His career might end before he has a chance to finish it.

"Like it or not, I have to think about it," he said this week. "In a perfect world, I'd play forever. In a near-perfect world, I would play as long as I could and never move again."

Oh, has he moved. He has been traded once at midseason, twice in draft-day deals and signed three free-agent contracts. When it came time to find another team last July, he weighed everything and decided to join the Jackets. He left a new home behind in Phoenix.

This was a difficult decision. The contract proffered by the Jackets — one year worth \$2 million, plus bonuses — was a factor, but it was not the only factor. Aucoin has more than hockey to think about. He and his wife, Caroline, have five children, and children do not naturally cotton to change.

"When I signed here, people asked me, 'Are you bringing the family?' " Aucoin said. "The alternative never really crossed my mind. I couldn't imagine it. Having parents around is the most important thing in the world."

Some of Aucoin's professional friends were surprised that he even moved at all. Why relocate to a city where you might not play? Why move when retirement was a possibility — a remote one, hopefully, but still within sight?

"For one thing, we didn't want to move halfway through the season, and we wanted to get here out of respect for the franchise," he said. "My wife always says, 'Things happen for a reason.' Even if I don't wind up playing a game for the Jackets, I think it has worked out."

"One guy I keep in touch with is Freddy Modin and he still lives in Columbus, which is a surprise because most Swedish guys go home as soon as they're done. The conversations I've had over the years with guys like Luke Richardson and Scott Lachance and Ray Whitney — these guys had nothing bad to say about it. They all said when the hockey gets on track, it'd be one of the better places in the league to play."

The Aucoins like the Midwest. They like the people, the family values and the friendly neighborhoods. They have settled easily in their Columbus suburb, where all five children attend the same Catholic school.

"My older daughter doesn't want to leave Columbus," Aucoin said. "My 10-year-old plays hockey, so he has a team and a set of friends. His buddies know I'm on the Blue Jackets and they want to see me play — and they ask me when the lockout is going to end."

It is an excellent question.

Aucoin has served on the union's negotiating committee. He has managed to keep his travel to a minimum, and his time at home to a maximum — until this week, when he traveled to New York and took part in another round of failed negotiations.

He might be spending his final days as a player at a bargaining table where bitterness and frustration will not abate. The strange thing is the sides are in agreement on a number of substantial issues. They seem close to a deal and, if they get one hammered out, they can get going in January and salvage a 48-game season. Surely, as the pressure mounts, an agreement will be forged. Right?

"I concur with the logic of that," Aucoin said. "Unfortunately, I think these guys have mapped it out this way with all their take-it-or-leave-it offers, maybe knowing exactly that thinking. There has been a lot of posturing and it has been pretty painful for both sides. It keeps dragging out."

It is time he will never get back.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 12.16.2012

646543 Dallas Stars

Will NHL players dissolve their union? We'll know on Sunday

Associated Press

TORONTO — NHL players will begin voting Sunday on whether they will grant the players' association's executive board the authority to dissolve the union because of the inability to reach a collective bargaining agreement with the league.

Two-thirds of the union's membership must vote in favor of allowing the executive board to file a "disclaimer of interest," a source told The Canadian Press on Saturday. Votes will be cast electronically over a five-day period that ends Thursday. If the measure passes, the 30-member executive board would have until Jan. 2 to file the disclaimer.

The union is taking steps toward breaking up even after the NHL started mounting a legal challenge against it.

On Friday, the NHL filed a class-action complaint which asked a federal court in New York to make a declaration on the legality of the lockout.

In the 43-page complaint, the league argued the players' association was only considering the "disclaimer of interest" to "extract more favorable terms and conditions of employment."

"The union has threatened to pursue this course not because it is defunct or otherwise incapable of representing NHL players for purposes of collective bargaining, nor because NHL players are dissatisfied with the representation they have been provided by the NHLPA," the NHL complaint said. "The NHLPA's threatened decertification or disclaimer is nothing more than an impermissible negotiating tactic, which the union incorrectly believes would enable it to commence an antitrust challenge to the NHL's lockout."

The NHL also filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

The union issued a statement on Friday night that claimed the league overstepped its bounds.

"The NHL appears to be arguing that players should be stopped from even considering their right to decide whether or not to be represented by a union," the statement said. "We believe that their position is completely without merit."

By filing the class-action complaint in New York, the league guaranteed that the legality of the lockout would be decided in a court known to be sympathetic toward management. If the NHLPA dissolves it will seek to have the lockout deemed illegal — something that could result in players being paid triple their lost salary in damages if successful.

Despite the focus of the lockout shifting from the board room to the courtroom, there is nothing preventing the sides from continuing to try to negotiate with each another. They met separately over two days with a U.S. federal mediator this week in New Jersey but failed to make any progress. No further talks are currently scheduled

Just eight years after becoming the first North American professional sports league to lose an entire season to a labor dispute, the NHL is in danger of repeating it.

Players have already missed five paychecks during the lockout that will enter its 14th week on Sunday. More than 500 regular-season games through Dec. 30 have been wiped off the schedule.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.16.2012

646544 Dallas Stars

Star date: Dec. 15, 2001 - Modano's sixth straight game with a goal is a rout

SportsDayDFW.com

PHOENIX - Mike Modano and Jere Lehtinen were just as good apart as they were together Saturday night.

Somewhere in coach Ken Hitchcock's constant line shuffling, the Stars found a way to restore the offense to Valeri Kamensky's game and a few others in a 6-2 win over the Phoenix Coyotes.

Kamensky's first two goals as a Star highlighted a four-goal first period that saw two goals in 35 seconds and three in 2:45 against Phoenix rookie goalie Patrick DesRochers. Ten different Stars finished with points.

"That's what you need, contributions from a lot of guys, and that's how you're going to win hockey games," said Pierre Turgeon, who assisted on both of Kamensky's goals and reached 700 for his career. "Obviously, we depend on a couple of guys. But this is always nice. It tells that you have a little more depth, and that's how you get through big games and the playoffs."

The Stars (14-9-6-3) tied a franchise record with their seventh consecutive road win, the longest in the NHL this season. Phoenix suffered its second home loss in 14 decisions.

While their record indicated success, Hitchcock fretted that linemates Modano and Lehtinen were carrying too much of the burden.

With 12 players holding negative plus-minuses, Hitchcock experimented.

Kamensky was the immediate beneficiary. His last goal had come April 1 as a New York Ranger, a span of 23 games.

"It gives me a lot of help," said Kamensky, a healthy scratch Friday against Calgary. "I score the goal. It's good for everybody. If you win the game you're happy, everybody is smiling."

Lehtinen and Modano continued their strong play.

Modano extended his point streak to nine games, two short of his career-best, with a power-play score. He has scored goals in six consecutive games, tying a career high.

Lehtinen has five goals in his past four games after a blowing a slap shot by DesRochers.

Briefly ...

The Stars received good news on defenseman Darryl Sydor, who suffered a concussion on a check Friday by Calgary's Denis Gauthier. A CT scan taken Friday night was normal, and Sydor was feeling better Saturday. He'll undergo NHL-mandated base line

testing Monday and could return against the San Jose Sharks.

-Chuck Carlton / DMN

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.16.2012

646545 Dallas Stars

NHL players to vote on dissolving union

TORONTO -- NHL players will begin voting today on whether they will grant the players' association's executive board the authority to dissolve the union because of the inability to reach a collective bargaining agreement with the league.

Two-thirds of the union's membership must vote in favor of allowing the executive board to file a "disclaimer of interest," a source told The Canadian Press on Saturday. Votes will be cast electronically over a five-day period that ends Thursday. If the measure passes, the 30-member executive board would have until Jan. 2 to file the disclaimer.

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The collective bargaining talks between the league and the union have dragged on for more than five months. The sides spent two days with a U.S. federal mediator this week and don't have any further talks currently scheduled.

Star-Telegram LOADED: 12.16.2012

646546 Detroit Red Wings

With tactics coming to a head, fate of NHL season will be known soon

Gregg Krupa

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and the owners have opted to try to frustrate the players association during negotiations in the latest lockout.

It will help, or it will not.

We will know within the next three weeks. That is the time remaining for the NHL and the players to cut the Gordian knot they have fashioned with their tactics throughout a two-month lockout, and play a harshly-abbreviated 48-game season.

The players intend to, in effect, disorganize so that they may sue the NHL. The league responded late Friday afternoon by going to federal court in Manhattan to block them and to the National Labor Relations Board to have the maneuver declared bargaining in bad faith.

At least it would be nice to think that might mean a resolution is closer.

It might be. But, then again ...

Discouraged? It is hard not to be.

Just when fans thought this all despicable enough to require only their revulsion, it gets more revolting.

It is as if Gary Bettman and the owners have declared, "We have record revenues, but our business model remains so dysfunctional it cannot be sustained. We can't discuss our problems rationally, let alone across a table — especially with that guy Don Fehr around — so let's have a judge fix it."

Sound like a plan?

Sure, if you are two four-year-olds fighting over a Christmas toy and asking mom to mediate. But not for grown men entrusted with the operation of what many of its fans believe is the world's greatest sport.

Old business

Make no mistake: No one ever planned to fix things here.

The strategy of Bettman and the owners from the start was to frustrate any sense on the part of the players that negotiating might be worthwhile, endeavor continually to separate them from Fehr, act like they are really, really angry, and then go to court.

It is right out of the playbook of the recent lockout in the NBA. In fact, some of the same lawyers are involved.

Nice when you can bulk-up those billable hours by pointing to work you already did the last time you closed down a sport, instead of doing actual work.

When it comes to representing professional sports leagues, they call that "practicing law."

What is a fan to do? Or a downtown business owner depending on six-months of hockey at Joe Louis Arena to remain open and put food on the table back home?

The hopeful will take encouragement from the fact that when the National Basketball Players Association began to disorganize the 2011 NBA lockout was lifted in 11 days, with a new collective bargaining agreement.

The hopeless will take discouragement from the fact that the NHL filing in federal district court in Manhattan late Friday afternoon may require the NHLPA to decertify rather than "disclaim interest," a bit of legalese bound to frustrate any NHL fan beyond words at this point.

What that might mean, however, is most unfortunate.

Instead of taking several days to obtain a disorganized state sufficient under the "disclaiming" process to show in court that it can now sue the NHL instead of bargaining with it, it may take two months to run through the "decertification" process, instead.

So, are things in the NHL even more of a fiasco now than they were Friday morning?

Pretty much.

Tell it to the judge

The court stuff is a sideshow, an expression of complete frustration on the part of the players that there was ever anything they were going to be able to do through negotiations to reach a fair agreement.

On the part of the owners, the maneuvers Friday were just that, a mere exercise intended to stymie any sense on the part of the players that they

have any hope for their futures other than finally, at long last, toeing the owners' line.

What the two sides are basically saying is that after four months of circling each other more than negotiating, after tactics on each side, after failing at mediation, after stomping off in a huff, they need to go to court to settle things.

But unless they continue negotiating toward a settlement, the court stuff probably will never save an abbreviated season. Not if it must begin by Jan. 20, or so, as it did in 1994-95, after a similarly miserable lockout.

The NBA and its players got a deal done within 11 days of the players moving to disclaim interest in their union, but only because they had substantive, even marathon, negotiations during the previous month.

Is the NHL there?

They seemed to make lots of progress three weeks ago, during their first substantive negotiations in weeks on Nov. 22. They, in fact, progressed last week, despite the breakdown in the talks and the vigorous theatrics Bettman and Fehr employed when things went awry.

But is that enough to now foster the sort of negotiating that can finally yield an agreement that will let hockey begin, while the lawyers gather before a judge and the NLRB?

We will know, within three weeks.

Detroit News LOADED: 12.16.2012

646547 Edmonton Oilers

NHL Lockout: NHL's class action complaint almost identical to NBA's, but the differences are illuminating

Jonathan Willis

It has been said that the current NHL lockout not only includes many of the same actors as last year's NBA labour dispute, but that it is in fact running off a nearly identical script as well. That belief got a lot of support on Friday with the NHL's preemptive legal strike against the NHLPA.

The class action complaint for declaratory relief was, like the NBA's, filed in the southern district court of New York. Like the NBA's, lawyers from the firms of Proskauer Rose and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom were listed at the bottom. But the similarities went much further.

In fact, huge stretches of the two documents were nearly identical. Five of the NHL's seven claims for relief were lifted directly from the NBA's complaint. The same arguments were made, the same language was used; some paragraphs could have been word-for-word quotations. Every single non-NBA specific argument made in that league's complaint was duplicated in the NHL's version.

However, there are differences, and those differences are suggestive. Here are three that stood out to me:

The way the case that a disclaimer of interest would be a bargaining tactic rather than a legitimate end to collective bargaining was presented. In both filings, a central argument was that whether the union opted for decertification or a disclaimer of interest, they didn't really mean it — in other words, it was a trick to negotiate a better deal and as such should be ignored.

Unfortunately for the NHL, while the NBPA has a pretty long track record of signing deals after talking about decertification, there is no similar track record with the NHLPA. So rather than just say 'look what they've done before!' the way the NBA was able to, they had to spend a lot more time building a case.

There are myriad extra paragraphs detailing individual players suggesting decertification as a bargaining tactic. There are references to the actions of other unions. To my untrained eye, however, while the NHL has supplied a ton of evidence they are missing two really key pieces: first, an NHLPA track record of doing what they're alleging, and secondly a Donald Fehr quote hinting at what they're alleging. They tried for the second; here's what they got:

You can look at what's happened in other sports and make your own judgment about [possible NHLPA decertification].

Damning it isn't.

This is totally the greatest union ever. I'm not sure if this point is so much illustrative as it is just plain funny, but after months of whispering that Donald Fehr was misleading his players and hinting that unity was a major problem, the league took pains to illustrate exactly how awesome the NHLPA has been for the players. The NHL's complaint digs up tweets, quotes, anything at all said by an NHL player that supports the argument the union is unified and meeting the needs of players. An excerpt from their conclusion, in paragraph 54:

In the recent days and weeks, NHL players have voiced their support for Executive Director Don Fehr, and Steve Fehr, special counsel to the NHLPA, said the union had been getting "amazing support" from the players. These comments do not suggest that the NHL players are unhappy with their Union representation, wish to oust current NHLPA leadership, permanently disband the Union, or prefer to pursue bargaining aims on an individual basis.

Damages. The NHL complaint also spends more time on the subject of damages than its NBA counterpart did. One of the two new claims for relief presented specifically asks that because the NHL lockout arose out of a legitimate collective bargaining process, the court should specifically say that there is no basis for individual players to go on to sue for damages. It's a point emphasized repeatedly throughout the document, and in paragraph 89 the league makes special mention of treble damages as something the court should rule against.

Of those three points, it is the first one that stood out to me most prominently. If I had just been reading the NHL filing, as a layman I likely would have come away with the impression that the league's argument was fairly strong. Compared to the NBA complaint, however, the meat behind the allegation that the NHLPA doesn't really intend to go through with decertifying seems quite thin.

Beyond that, for the most part the overriding message I got from comparing the two documents is that for all the ups and downs of this dispute, on the NHL side the playbook was written well in advance and they're walking step for step in the trail blazed by the NBA.

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646548 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers Devon Dubnyk exploring his overseas playing options

By Derek Van Diest ,Edmonton Sun

EDMONTON - Devan Dubnyk has been building up a lot of airline points trying to find ice time during the NHL lockout.

But if the dispute between the league and its players association is not resolved soon, the Edmonton Oilers goaltender may have to look for a more permanent solution. Possibly overseas.

Whether it's for a stint or the rest of the season, Dubnyk wants to start playing games.

"I'll go somewhere to play even if it were just three games," said Dubnyk. "I would still go even if I knew it was going to be for only 10 days. I still have my eyes and ears open, unfortunately it's tough to do, it's tough to find a spot as a goalie.

"Unfortunately teams that are looking for goalies are looking for guys to play the whole year."

Dubnyk had hoped the lockout would be resolved, and at this point would be back in the Oilers net battling for the starting position with Nikolai Khabibulin.

However, with the two sides dug in and heading toward litigation, Dubnyk has started to look at alternative options.

"Cory Schneider went over to Switzerland because he got his Swiss citizenship," Dubnyk said. "I've actually been looking to do that with the German citizenship. I'm still looking into it, but it's kind of a process and I

don't really know how long it's going to be. I'm still going through with it and it's kind of worst-case scenario type of thing, that if it worked, that would be an option."

Dubnyk's grandparents on his mother's side were German, so through the proper channels, he would be able to apply for citizenship, opening the door for him to play there.

"I guess it trickles down," he said. "My mom is automatically a citizen because of that, even though she doesn't have papers or a passport. She just has to file papers for it, which then makes me a citizen, which is what I've been told.

"My uncle — my mom's brother was living in Wales — and he got it done, he got his German passport and that's who explained to us how it works. He was actually able to send all the papers that we needed from Germany to us so that was a big help, because I think if he hadn't had done that, there would be no shot."

If Dubnyk does go the citizenship route, he would not be taking up an import spot, which may make him more appealing to a German team.

However, even with a European passport, he would still be considered an import player in any other league.

"I think it's still league to league, I think it would still just have to be the German league," Dubnyk said. "If you kind of go on the rosters from each league, they're filled up with guys from that country. It's not like it's a big list of European players.

"I think that would only open up Germany for me, which is fine, that's a good league."

The German Elite league features 14 teams. At last count, there were 11 locked out NHLers playing in it, including Los Angeles Kings goaltender Jonathan Bernier, Colorado Avalanche centre Paul Stastny, Dallas Stars winger Jamie Benn and Philadelphia Flyers centre Daniel Briere.

Notes: Ladislav Smid is back in Edmonton having spent the lockout to this point with Bili Tygri Liberec in the Czech Republic Extraliga. Smid returned to have a sprained knee looked at by local doctors. According to the Oilers, Smid was not looked at by their medical staff. Depending on NHL labour negotiations, the Oilers defenceman is expected to return to the Czech Republic after the league's break.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646549 Edmonton Oilers

World Juniors a confidence builder for Edmonton Oilers Taylor Hall

By Derek Van Diest ,Edmonton Sun

EDMONTON - Having been cut by Team Canada in 2009, Taylor Hall knew what he needed to do in order to avoid disappointment the following year.

The Edmonton Oilers winger had been lighting things up in with the Windsor Spitfires that season and simply needed to be able to fit into the Canadian system.

"I was confident the second time around, they gave me a bit of a heads up, that if I played a game that was more team-orientated and more defensive, then I would be on the team," Hall said. "From there I played well in the exhibition games and at camp, and they gave me a shot on the power play with Ebs (Jordan Eberle), (Alex) Pietrangelo and (Ryan) Ellis and I felt really comfortable at that level.

"That tournament really did make me feel a lot better about playing in the NHL the year after my draft year. It gave me a lot of confidence even though we didn't win it. I was 18, I was still the youngest player on the team and the only one that was draft eligible."

Hall had the pleasure of experiencing the tournament in Canada, where it takes on a whole different meaning.

In 2010, the event was held in Saskatchewan with Saskatoon playing host to the final.

"It's a huge party when it's in Canada and it's pretty special when you can play in a tournament like that and have all your family and friends around,"

Hall said. "You're not playing in a place that's 13 time zones away. Everyone can watch your games and certainly when you get a chance to play in Canada, I think, it's a lot better than the experience overseas."

Canada was going for a sixth-consecutive title in 2010, but despite cruising through the tournament, ran into a tough American squad that were able to pull out a 6-5 overtime victory.

John Carlson scored the winner for the Americans.

"There was a lot of pressure on that team," Hall said. "After every practice there were a lot of video sessions and after every practice we had to deal with a lot of media. It's a very hectic experience when you're playing for Canada in Canada.

"You feel that pressure, you want to perform for your country and make sure that when you're on a stage like that, you want to do the best job you can."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646550 Edmonton Oilers

World Junior was 'a coming out party' for Edmonton Oilers Jordan Eberle

By Derek Van Diest ,Edmonton Sun

EDMONTON - Jordan Eberle scored one of the most memorable goals in Canadian World Junior Championship history.

And of all the goals the Edmonton Oilers winger has scored to date in his young career, it ranks with the biggest, setting the stage for Canada to win its fifth consecutive championship in 2009.

"Ottawa was a great tournament. We got to play in front of 20,000 people, which you're not used to doing as a kid," Eberle said. "I remember that semifinal game, it was such a back-and-fourth game, it seemed like every time we scored, the Russians would come back and get one.

"Before we knew it, we were tied and then they scored late and we were down with three minutes left to go."

Playing in his first of two tournaments, Eberle was on the ice in the final seconds of Canada's semifinal encounter against Russia.

All seemed lost until he picked up a loose puck in front of the Russian net and lifted a backhand shot over goaltender Vadim Zhelobnyuk to tie the game with 5.4 seconds left in regulation.

"The puck got rimmed around the boards and Ryan Ellis kept it in," Eberle said. "Then John Tavares threw it at the net. Their defenceman misplayed it in front and I was able to grab the puck from him and kind of just put it in. I don't want to say it was a lucky goal, but it was a little bit fluky. It was a fortunate bounce. But it was a pretty big moment for me and our team."

Eberle then went on to score in the shootout as the Canadians completed the comeback. Then they beat Sweden in the final to earn gold.

"For me it was a kind of a coming-out party," Eberle said. "You get confidence when you can play at that level and do well against the best in your age group. It just sets you up for the NHL.

"I remember coming back from the world juniors and having all that confidence. I came back to the Western Hockey League and played really well and the points just came. It's a huge tournament for guys that want to build confidence and get to that next level."

The next year, the tournament was held in Saskatoon, where Eberle, a Regina product, would be able to play in front of his friends and family.

Unfortunately the 2010 tournament ended in disappointment as American defenceman John Carlson scored in overtime of the gold-medal game to give the United States a 6-5 victory.

"It was good, I got to play in my home province and we were going for six in a row so there was a lot of pressure," Eberle said. "We made it to the final. We had played pretty well, we had a pretty easy tournament, we had walked over everyone there. And then in derek.vandiast@sunmedia.ca

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646551 Edmonton Oilers

Second time lucky for Edmonton Oilers Devan Dubnyk with Team Canada

By Derek Van Diest ,Edmonton Sun

EDMONTON - Devan Dubnyk knew there were no guarantees when it came to making Team Canada.

Despite being a selection camp invite the previous season, the Edmonton Oilers goaltender was still nervous in the lead up to the 2006 tournament.

"It's one of those things that nothing is a guarantee when you get to camp, whether or not you're going to be there, regardless of what happened the previous year," Dubnyk said. "The fact that I was the only one that had been there the year before didn't really matter, and I knew that. It was still a nerve-racking experience. It's intense. It's a short camp and there was a lot on the line."

At the time, Dubnyk was starring for the Kamloops Blazers and was a highly-touted NHL prospect, having been a first-round pick of the Oilers.

None of that mattered, however, trying to fulfill a lifelong dream.

"It's always better having gone through the process once," he said. "But even the second time around there was just a ton of nerves, because it's something that you want so bad.

Dubnyk did make the team, who went on to capture gold at the tournament in Vancouver. Surprisingly, however, the Canadian coaching staff wasn't the first to tell him.

"When I was there, no one got cut during camp, it all happened on the last day, you either made it or you didn't.

"I remember being in my hotel room that morning and I was staring out the window 30 floors up and trying to figure out who was cut. You could see guys that got the phone call walking out with their hockey bag, talking to the media and I'm trying to see if there are any goalies down there.

"Then I started hearing from friends and family that it had popped up on TV the two goalies that got cut and I wasn't one of them. That's how I found out I made the team."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646552 Edmonton Oilers

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins finally living the World Juniors dream

By Derek Van Diest ,Edmonton Sun

EDMONTON - It's a tournament that every Canadian kid growing up watching hockey dreams of playing in.

It's a holiday tradition in the country.

But few actually get an opportunity to play in a World Junior Hockey Championship. Even less can lay claim to winning a gold medal.

"Getting a chance to play in that tournament is just something that you hold on to, you remember the tournament and you make a lot of good friends from it," said Edmonton Oilers goaltender Devan Dubnyk. "You can always look back on that tournament and know that you were a part of it, knowing it's something that a lot of the best players in the world didn't necessarily get to do, just because it is such a small window and it's one shot.

"If you have one bad camp, you may not get a chance to play in the tournament. You could go on to be in the Hockey Hall of Fame, it doesn't necessarily mean that you would have gotten a chance to play in the World Juniors. It's a pretty cool opportunity."

The Oilers have always been well represented at the event, especially in recent years.

Dubnyk won gold with Team Canada in Vancouver in 2006. Sam Gagner did it the following year in Leksand, Sweden. Jordan Eberle scored a memorable goal in the semifinals in Ottawa on the way to gold in 2009. In 2010, both Eberle and Taylor Hall were members of the Canadian squad that was upset in the final by the United States.

This year, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is taking part in the event, one of the few positives that have come out of the NHL lockout.

"The World Junior is a pretty special tournament," said Eberle. "Everyone watches that tournament during Christmas and getting a chance to represent your country is pretty awesome. Canada is expected to win every time you go — second place is not an option.

"It's going to be good for Ryan, it's good that he got the chance. He got cut the one year, so I know he has a lot to prove this year."

Where it not for the NHL work stoppage, Nugent-Hopkins could have been on his way to becoming one of those great players who never represented his country at the event.

Despite being favoured to go first overall in his draft year, Nugent-Hopkins was cut by Team Canada as a 17-year-old for the 2011 tournament in Buffalo, New York, where Canada went on to lose to Russia in the gold-medal game.

The following year, Nugent-Hopkins was playing with the Edmonton Oilers and was not made available to Team Canada.

"It's going to be a new experience for me, so I'm excited about that," Nugent-Hopkins said. "I'm going to try and take on a role of leader there and am excited about that challenge. It's going to be fun.

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

"I've always watched the World Junior championships. It's a great opportunity to represent your country and I want to bring home the gold."

Nugent-Hopkins will be relied on heavily by Canada in an effort to win the gold medal for the first time since Eberle's heroics in Ottawa.

He's traveling to Ufa, Russia with arguably Canada's strongest entry since the last NHL lockout, where Sidney Crosby and company steamrolled over the competition in Fargo, North Dakota in 2005.

"It's been a few years since Canada has won gold," Nugent-Hopkins said. "But definitely I think we're going to have a really good team going in, and I'm excited about being on the team.

"The World Juniors is always a great tournament. I remember when I was younger watching Crosby when he played. I remember watching Jonathan Toews when he got those shootout goals, that was definitely exciting. I remember watching Jordan when he got the tying goal against the Russians. There were some good memories and every Christmas you look forward to watching the world juniors and I'm glad I can now be part of it."

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646553 Los Angeles Kings

Bob Miller (Part 2...of 3)

Posted by Jim Fox on 15 December 2012, 1:01 pm

In part 2, Bob talks about some memorable speaker's from the SCSB luncheons...some tech innovations over the years...taped vs. live broadcasts...things he used to worry about and why he never developed any shtick?

JF: I know it's always tough to pick just one, but are there any memorable speeches from the luncheons or an awards banquet?

Bob Miller: Yeah let's see, we've had some really good speakers, Jim Harrick, the former basketball coach at UCLA is always good, he's upbeat, he would come and talk about the basketball tournament in March, we'd call it March Madness, let's see who else do we have as a really good speaker you know one of the luncheons we honored Louis Zamperini, the book Unbroken was about him—he was a track athlete at USC and an Olympic

athlete and then was stranded at sea during World War II, survived 47 days at sea in a rubber raft and then in a Japanese prison camp and he came back and he was a speaker at the luncheon at 94 years of age and he was just outstanding so you know we get some really good people to come and tell of their experiences and talk about what they've done in sports and usually pretty good speakers all the time.

JF: You've been involved in sports for over 50 years as a broadcaster—can you talk about the technical innovations that make your job easier or maybe more difficult—technology that stands out over the last 50 years?

Bob Miller: I'll tell you when I started out, we didn't have any videotape, we were shooting film and so you had to shoot film and go back to the station and develop the film and then edit the film, splice it together—looking back at it now it's kind of primitive but that's what we had to work with until portable video tape was available so that's been a big change. Probably the biggest change has been the fact that you have remote trucks now, where the station sends the remote truck out to the venue, they put up the antenna and they can do live shots all night long from out there—that has really made a huge difference, especially for the guys doing nightly sports shows where you can have them reporting right from the scene of the game either before a game starts or after a game, interviewing players right away without having to get back to the station. Years ago when they were doing film, they'd have a helicopter, a guy would run out and give the film to the helicopter pilot and he'd fly it back to channel four or channel two and somebody would start editing the film so that's been a major difference and of course now with the social media and the immediacy of sports and things that happen, you almost have to change the way you approach results in a game because it's instantaneous where people know what went on, as far as what I think, a magazine that does a tremendous job of writing a story that's interesting to you, even a week after an event happens is Sports Illustrated. Those writers can take, when you know what happened in a game and write an article that you still want to read and you learn things that you didn't know before—four or five days after the fact.

I think from a preparation standpoint—for me it's almost harder to and takes longer to prepare for our telecast now then it ever did 35 or 40 years ago and I think the difference is the volume of material that is out there and available either on computers or Twitter or Facebook or whatever, whereas when I started with the Kings, we got stats from the league once a week on Monday and if you had other games, you had to update those stats by yourself and you got very limited notes, you didn't see any other newspaper articles around the league and now, you've got all those available to you on the computer and I think it's always in the back of my mind that a lot of that material is also available to fans and they are super fans in that they read and digest everything that's out there and I think sometimes it's hard to say—I hope I'm keeping up to date as much as the fans are on what we're talking about and I think that has been a tremendously major difference between now and when I started 40 years ago with the Kings.

JF: I think many people don't think a lot about it—I've started to think about it since I've become a broadcaster—can you talk about some of the differences between doing a studio taped broadcast interview versus live?

Bob Miller: Well I think live is so much better because, first of all, in the announcer's mind you realize, ok we're live, that we're not on tape and say 'I didn't like that' or somebody says lets stop the tape and do it again, it's always much better in your mind to say 'okay we're live, we're going to do this'—I think you're more keyed up and you're sharper when you're doing it live than if you're doing it on tape and I always said to people, even after all these years, I still get excited about doing live television because sports and news are just about the only live telecasts now anywhere and it's a thrill for me to realize that we're going to go on live T, for two-and-a-half maybe three hours and hope we can do a good job with a minimum of mistakes and see how it turns out. The other thing is also to have a half hour interview is so much easier than two-and-a-half minutes because with the half hour you just explore things that might come up and not worry about the time. When you got two-and-a-half minutes, you really got to put in, prioritize the important questions you want at the top of the interview just in case you run out of time.

JF: When you started, what were some of the things that you used to worry about a lot and now they don't even bother you because maybe you've been through it so many times before?

Bob Miller: Well when I started I used to worry if every word out of my mouth would satisfy Jack Kent Cooke, who owned of the team and that it was hampering me a little bit in doing this game and I remember about a month or two into my first year with the Kings, I thought I'm going to do the games tonight the way I know best and if that's not good enough for Mr. Cooke, he can fire me and get someone else and it worked out all right but

yeah I still think you worry about identification of players, which I know you spend and I spend a lot of time on memorizing names and numbers so that you won't have to look down at charts and you can just look at the game and describe it that way. Sometimes years ago, if things would go wrong technically—I used to let it bother me, soon I just decided I'm not in the technical end of this broadcast or telecast and I know nothing about this so I'll just sit here and wait until they tell me everything's been fixed and we're on the air but it used to bother me if we had trouble getting on the air and things like that and finally I just decided that we do so many games, not every night is going to be perfect, you just kind of go with the flow and do the best you can and usually it works out.

JF: This next one is tough because when asking it I realize there's been some people who've been very successful with shtick or have a style or something like that—a catchphrase. I know I've talked about it before, you've heard me talk about it before, how I think it's amazing that you just do the game. Did you ever think about developing shtick, catchphrase, something like that?

Bob Miller: If I think about it, it's the fact that I never really came up with anything good...you know what I mean. I think some people still like that 'he shoots, he scores,' but that was Foster Hewitt and that was not original. You know a lot of guys use that to describe goals which I think the reason a lot of us use it is it really is about the best way to describe it and gets fans excited, you know you've got other guys like Mike Lange in Pittsburgh, he's got all of his sayings and they're good...

...but I think I judged the audience out here that they were satisfied without having what you call a shtick and going overboard in your description of the game and the more I did that, the more I thought well that's the way people want it because I was getting positive feedback. I didn't try to come up with things—I tried to rack my mind and try to telecast interesting and if you can put some humor once in a while you can do that but I tried that once when Mr. Cooke owned the team and that day he said to me, 'dear boy do you know who my next door neighbor is?' and I said 'no, I don't Mr. Cooke.' He said, 'Well it's Jerry Lewis. He's got fourteen writers, you don't have any, don't try to be funny.'...

...So that kind of shot me down right there, trying to do much humor but you and I on the air we can try some things some nights without going overboard with crazy sayings that people are trying to figure out what the heck is he saying. I think most of the other announcers you know Chick Hearn did come up with some great sayings for basketball but then Vin on baseball—plays it pretty straight, as I've learned, usually do it that way too—so I just went along with what I thought was successful.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646554 Minnesota Wild

NHL seeking to void contracts if players go 'disclaimer of interest' route

Posted by: Michael Russo under The draft, Wild off-season news Updated: December 15, 2012 - 11:30 AM

We're at the point of the NHL lockout where we've gone from mediation to potentially the court system.

On Friday, it was first reported by TSN's Aaron Ward that the NHLPA Executive Board decided on Thursday that it's time to seek a vote from the 700-plus player membership whether or not to authorize the Board to file a disclaimer of interest if it so chooses. So, to be clear: Not to necessarily go that route; just to vote to give the Board that authorization if it wants to go that route.

A disclaimer of interest is essentially where Executive Director Don Fehr and the NHLPA effectively walk away from the players and say the Union no longer represents its membership. That gives players the right to file lawsuits against the NHL for locking them out and to go after all the things agreed upon in that collective bargaining agreement, things like the draft, free agency, etc., etc.

The Union has been discussing this possibility publicly for some time. But in a preemptive strike once that threat became public knowledge, the NHL filed a class action complaint in federal court in New York seeking a declaration that the lockout is legal AND the NHL filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), alleging

that by threatening to "disclaim interest," the NHLPA has engaged in an unlawful subversion of the collective bargaining process and conduct that constitutes bad faith bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act.

The NHLPA says this is "completely without merit."

The 43-page complaint to federal court can be read here, courtesy of Sportsnet in Canada. Named as defendants are the NHLPA, the 31 players on the negotiating committee, including Minnesotans David Backes, Jamie Langenbrunner and Alex Goligoski and also five others that have different types of contract statuses (restricted free agent, unrestricted, unsigned draft pick, etc., and an NHLer playing overseas -- Minnesotan Ryan McDonagh).

In the complaint are several players quoted either in articles or on Twitter where they talked publicly decertification (where the players disavow themselves from the union rather than vice versa) or disclaimer of interest. In addition, the NHL has taken quotes of players also demonstrating complete faith in the Fehr Bros., so the league is trying to demonstrate that this would just be a negotiating ploy and not the fact that the union cannot adequately represent the players.

(This is clearly one reason why Commissioner Gary Bettman doesn't allow owners to speak publicly. May this be a learning lesson to us all; words can be used against you at a later date).

So while the NHLPA's main objective might be to try to make the NHL budge and negotiate a CBA (owners don't want to 1) pay excessive damages to the players potentially in lawsuits and 2) operate a league where there's no rules), the NHL is now trying to dissuade the players from going this route.

Regardless, according to RDS in Canada, starting Sunday, the NHLPA will have a five-day vote to see if the board is authorized to go the disclaimer of interest route if it so chooses by Jan. 2. Two-thirds of the players would have to vote yes for the NHLPA to then decide whether it should go this way.

As part of the NHL complaint, the most interesting section is No. 14: "In the event that the court does not grant the declarations described in paragraphs 9 through 13, the NHL requests a declaration that, if the NHLPA's decertification or disclaimer were not deemed invalid by the NLRB, and the collective bargaining relationship between the parties were not otherwise to continue, all existing contracts between NHL players and NHL teams (known as Standard Player's Contracts or "SPCs") would be void and unenforceable."

Basically, what the league is saying is that if the collective bargaining agreement ceases to exist, contracts negotiating under it should not exist either.

Via email, I was in touch today with TSN legal analyst and Partner at Gowlings in Ottawa Eric Macramalla (must follow on Twitter at @EricOnSportsLaw) to ask essentially what this means. His reply:

"The NBA argued the same thing — that player contracts would be void because the CBA no longer applies once the Union decertifies or disclaims interest. The league is arguing that the player contract is governed by, and is in, the CBA. By extension if the collective bargaining relationship between the players and the owners is over by way of the disclaimer or decertification, then player contracts should also cease thereby becoming void.

"That is an ambitious argument. It would meet with resistance from the players. It may also be a tough argument to make successfully in court. A judge may not want to strike down the contracts unless the player contracts actually says the contract is void under these circumstances. So may be a tough one for the NHL to prevail on but there is nothing wrong with advancing the argument. We do that kind of stuff all the time at law."

A few people have asked me if the NHL somehow won this argument if the NHLPA disclaims interest, does that mean "we lose Parise and Suter."

I kinda chuckled. It means ALL contracts in the NHL would be void.

I have trouble buying that we'll ever get to that juncture.

Basically right now, there's a whole lot of uncertainty about where this goes from here.

The hope is like the NBA, all these type of threats suddenly cause both sides to compromise and strike a deal and say, "is this all worth it?"

That happened in the NBA when 12 days after the players filed a disclaimer of interest last year, the lockout was over.

So, some feel this could actually spur a deal relatively soon.

I just don't know. First, I have covered the NHL since 1995. I have learned that sanity rarely prevails in this league.

The anger between these two sides right now is venomous.

The owners have dug in, clearly incensed by Don Fehr. The players are downright offended by the way they've been treated. And as we all know by now, you pick a fight with a bunch of hockey players, and they'll rally together and fight back.

My fear is go the disclaimer of interest route, I don't know if we have 30 teams on the back end of that thorny process. That may sound like a good thing for those who want the NHL to lose all the unhealthy markets to begin with, BUT, I hope the players understand that lost teams mean scores of lost jobs as well. So, be careful what you're voting for if you're a fringe player.

On the other hand, maybe this is the type of thing that causes the owners to cave. What would a disclaimer of interest do to franchise values? Who the heck is buying an NHL team if there's no collective bargaining agreement to essentially restrict player rights and keep this from being the Wild, Wild West?

(By the way, imagine what the heck new St. Louis owner Tom Stillman is thinking right now. "I just bought into this!" I'm shocked Greg Jamison is still going through with his purchase of Phoenix during this whole mess).

Anyway, I'm rambling.

To me, this is all scary and as I've said throughout this lockout, as somebody who loves the game and has spent his entire adulthood covering this great game at the NHL level, it bothers me what these sides are doing to the future of this league. The damage right now is vast.

I'd also like to get back to covering hockey games and not pretending I'm some economic expert crunching numbers in CBA proposals and now some legal expert trying to figure out the nuances of decertification, disclaimers of interest and class action complaints!

I'll be on KFAN today in studio at 1:35 p.m. CT, probably with my blood pressure rising throughout. I should also have an article with an update to this chaos in Tuesday's paper.

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.16.2012

646555 Nashville Predators

Frustrated Predators fans turn to high school hockey

Josh Cooper

FRANKLIN — Bright bulbs shine over the twin ice rinks at A-Game Sportsplex on Wednesday and Friday evenings during the winter months. There's contact, there's cheering and there's celebration.

With high school football season officially over, a different type of "Friday Night Lights" grips 16 teams and 25 area high schools.

The Greater Nashville Scholastic Hockey League, or GNASH for short, is where hockey-starved fans can get their sticks-and-pucks fix a couple of times a week during the NHL lockout.

The prep players "know they're in the limelight now in Middle Tennessee," Centennial High coach Mark Layne said. "There's no hockey to watch with the Predators, so they know people are coming to watch high school hockey."

A-Game is one of the area hockey hubs. A large portion of the Predators' season-ticket base comes from the suburbs in Williamson County, and two of the top GNASH teams — Centennial and Ravenwood — are from the area. Games also are played at Centennial Sportsplex in Nashville.

On a recent Friday at A-Game, the slate of four games started with a match of two combination teams, Ensworth-Goodpasture and Independence-Summit. Since some high schools don't have enough players to field their own teams, they must unite with others. That's why there are 16 teams but 25 schools in the league.

Although Ensworth-Goodpasture lost 6-3 on this night, the players believe they have a secret weapon that will help them down the road. Predators defenseman Hal Gill, a veteran NHL player, has been practicing with them and teaching them a few tricks of the trade.

"He has brought us back to the fundamental things, kind of working on our edges and the basic skating things," captain Neal Rice said. "It seems really elementary when you're doing it, but we've noticed a definite increase in skating ability."

Gill's presence is made possible by the lockout, of course. Many players at this game are big fans of the Predators, and the absence of NHL play has left a noticeable void in their lives.

"I hate the lockout," said Collin Basilius, who plays for Independence-Summit. "I really like watching the professional games, but it's disappointing."

It also takes a teaching tool away from the coaches, who often look to NHL games for pointers.

"That's where they get all their drive and determination from," Mt. Juliet-Rossvie coach Keith Grooms said. "I tell these guys all the time, since there's no hockey to watch, to go on YouTube and Watch videos."

Not yet a hotbed

Many of the coaches, like Grooms, are not employees of the respective schools.

Grooms, a native of Alaska, works in an information technology company's marketing department. Father Ryan coach Walt Wasyliv works in the financial sector for Bancsource. He moved to Nashville from Chicago and is one of the many coaches who grew up in a hockey hotbed. Ensworth-Goodpasture's Jason Robinson is from Detroit.

The coaches from Tennessee, however, have the most interesting stories about how they got into the sport. Layne, from Pulaski, did not start playing hockey until he was 40, about eight years ago. He started playing because his son picked up the game. Layne then took USA Hockey certification classes and became a coach.

As of Wednesday, his Centennial squad was tied with Hendersonville for first place in the Gold division.

"Thirteen or 14 years ago we never thought this would happen in Franklin, Tennessee," Layne said. "When the Predators came to town, everybody started thinking about building youth hockey programs so we could build the interest for the Predators."

Independence-Summit coach Jay Richardson is from the Nashville/Murfreesboro area, but he learned the sport while living in St. Louis.

"That is where my hockey background is from and where I really got my roots and learned to love the game," he said.

High school hockey will never be on the same level as high school football in this area. And it probably will have trouble competing with basketball, at least until it can start producing high-level talent.

Montreal Canadiens forward Blake Geoffron is the first and only Nashvillian to make it to the NHL. And he left the area to go to high school in Michigan.

But GNASH president Tom Feeney said the quality of the estimated 350 players has increased considerably.

"What's really been amazing about the league is the growth in the skill level of these kids," he said. "We have players now who are so good and fun to watch, both the skaters and the goalies, just very high-level skills."

Interest is growing

And there is interest. According to A-Game, 612 people paid to watch the four games on this Friday night. The players enjoy the atmosphere and see a real boost in crowd size and student participation.

"It's grown a lot," Father Ryan goaltender Dillon Brady said. "Not a lot of people used to go to games; not a lot of people knew we had a hockey team. Now we're on the announcements when we win or almost every time we play."

There are still issues for the sport at this level in this area. The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association does not govern hockey. That means players such as Mt. Juliet-Rossvie goaltender Shaun Silk can't list

it as a varsity sport on their college transcripts. Instead Silk lists it as a club sport.

"It would definitely be nice to do that," he said.

But it's still fun for Silk, even on a night when his team loses 8-1 to Centennial.

"Sometimes I'll get my friends to come ride with me to the games and spread the word around school with them," he said. "We have the principal announce the game time to see if anybody would like to go. Not yet, but hopefully one day we can get a good fan section from Rossvie."

Reach Josh Cooper

at 615-726-8917

Tennessean LOADED: 12.16.2012

646556 New Jersey Devils

Players to Vote on Whether Board Can Dissolve Union

By REUTERS

Voting will be done electronically and continue through Thursday, a source familiar with the proceedings told Reuters on Saturday.

A two-thirds majority will be needed to give the 30-member executive board the power to file a "disclaimer of interest" that would disband the union and free players to file anti-trust suits with the courts.

The NHL Players' Association (NHLPA) has not yet said it plans to file the disclaimer but could go that route if negotiations remained stalled.

The league moved to prevent the NHLPA from decertifying on Friday, filing a class action complaint against the players' union.

The NHL asked U.S. courts to confirm the legality of the lockout and simultaneously filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL) players pursued similar courses in 2011 labor disputes with their leagues before new collective bargaining agreements were eventually reached.

The legal maneuvering follows two unsuccessful days of bargaining with U.S. federal mediators trying to jump start stalled talks on a new collective bargaining agreement.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has said he cannot see the league, which normally runs an 82-game regular season, playing less than a 48-game campaign. But with games through December, 42.8 percent of the schedule, already canceled, time is quickly running out for salvaging even a partial season.

The two sides appear to have inched closer on the main sticking point of how to divide \$3.3 billion in revenue.

The league is seeking an immediate 50-50 split while players, who will see their share chopped from 57 percent, want the cuts brought in gradually with a "make whole" provision in place to cover money that would be lost on current contracts.

Several other contentious items remain on the table, including the length of a new collective bargaining agreement, contract limits, drug testing and continued participation in the Winter Olympics.

(Reporting by Steve Keating in Toronto, Editing by Gene Cherry)

New York Times LOADED: 12.16.2012

646557 New Jersey Devils

Devils' Matt Corrente out for season after shoulder surgery

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

Devils defenseman Matt Corrente underwent successful shoulder surgery on Friday but will be lost for the remainder of the season.

Plagued by injuries the past few seasons, Corrente, 24, was hurt in Albany's AHL game last Sunday against the Connecticut Whale at the XL Center.

"Yesterday, Matt underwent successful surgery on his shoulder. As a result, he is expected to miss the remainder of the regular season," Albany general manager Chris Lamoriello said in a statement.

Corrente was the Devils' first pick (30th overall) in the 2006 NHL entry draft. He has played 34 NHL games, collecting no goals with six assists and 68 penalty minutes.

In 11 games with Albany this season, Corrente had no goals and two assists. He was minus-1 with 32 penalty minutes.

Last season the 6-0, 205-pound native of Mississauga, Ont., played 39 games for Albany. He was sidelined with a shoulder injury and twisted leg.

In 2010-11, Corrente was limited to three games with Albany and 22 for the Devils. He suffered a broken hand in an Oct. 27, 2010 fight with San Jose's Ryan Clowe and then a shoulder injury in a Jan. 14, 2011 fight with Tampa Bay's Steve Downie.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.16.2012

646558 New Jersey Devils

NHL fears Fehr itself

By LARRY BROOKS

This was Dec. 6, when Canceled-in-Chief Gary Bettman and deputy Bill (The Hill) Daly delivered their Angry Men standup routine at a press conference after a group of players had the temerity not to sign on the dotted line even after a handful of owners all but directed them to do so.

Bettman was asked about the possibility the NHLPA might decertify. After suggesting the players were more likely to file a disclaimer of interest, he analyzed the union's potential legal maneuver as follows:

"We don't view it in the same way in terms of its impact as apparently the union may," is what the discredited face of the NHL said.

Well, OK, but then what was the NHL doing rushing to U.S. District Court on Friday afternoon to file a class action complaint against the union in order to prevent the PA from disclaiming and/or decertifying?

Disclaiming and decertifying are neither maneuvers nor tenets PA executive director Don Fehr embraces easily. This true believer in the power of collective bargaining has been loath to go down this route even while the rank-and-file has coalesced behind the process over the last month.

And yet here is the No Hope League, in court rather than on ice, filing actions to prevent the PA from undertaking an action of its own that the league is on record as believing would have negligible impact, anyway.

Reading the NHL's complaint is a hoot. Honestly, it is. Before this — and the last couple of weeks — who would have believed the league's hierarchy that includes Proskauer Rose power counsel Bob (The Buster) Batterman were such cut-ups?

Stop and think for a moment. Here is the league that just over a week ago was doing everything in its power to keep Don Fehr out of the bargaining process, and is now going to court to ensure he continues to represent the players in the bargaining process.

For weeks now, the NHL has sent its messengers to deliver the message the NHLPA is not truly united behind Fehr and union leadership; that the players, left to their own decision-making process, would rush to accept whatever the league at the time had on the table.

Or, in another word, "Vote!"

Yet there in Paragraph 54 of the complaint is the NHL citing numerous examples of players articulating support for Fehr and the PA leadership

which the league posits, "... do not suggest that the NHL players are unhappy with their Union representation [or] wish to oust current NHLPA leadership..."

Don Fehr. League can't live with him, now the league can't live without him.

Paragraph 102 is a good one. For months the NHL has been telling anyone who would listen that up to 18 of its franchises lose money, with many of those franchises in need of life support. For months the league has been instructing us not to confuse revenue with profits.

Fair enough.

But then these are the league's own words right there in Paragraph 102: "The system of common employment rules [the CBA] instituted in 2005 improved the financial stability of the entire NHL, including most of its clubs..."

Most of its clubs?

Really?

Hmm.

What to make of the thought process behind Paragraph 62?

The combination of restrictions proposed by the NHL leading into and throughout the lockout is designed to limit the impact of free agency and funnel players toward teams they might not consider given a full plate of options.

Yet there is the NHL in Paragraph 62 suggesting every player in the league become a free agent if the NHLPA were permitted to disclaim or decertify.

"[Existing] contracts ...[would be] void and unenforcable by law," in the league's own words.

Goodbye Columbus!

And wouldn't it just be grand if, under universal free agency, not a single player would choose to sign with Jeremy Jacobs' Bruins?

But if searching for a side-splitter, one only need to turn to Paragraph 22, which contains a collection of words destined to live forever in the history of comedy.

For this is what the league declares to U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York in Paragraph 22 of its class action complaint for declaratory relief:

"The NHL is engaged in, among other things, the public exhibition of professional hockey games..."

Hahahahahahahahaha.

(Deep breath)

Hahahahahahahahaha.

New York Post LOADED: 12.16.2012

646559 New York Islanders

NHL lockout hurting Coliseum-area businesses

By ROBERT BRODSKY robert.brodsky@newsday.com

Frank Borrelli, 53, is the co-owner of Borrelli's,

Three months into the National Hockey League lockout, businesses along Hempstead Turnpike near the Nassau Coliseum are feeling the pinch from the cancellation of Islanders home games -- and there may be no end in sight for distressed merchants.

Several restaurants near the arena, where hockey fans and arena staff often dined before and after games, are reporting steep reductions in revenue from late September through mid-December, when 17 home games and three preseason games were canceled.

Another four home games later this month have also been canceled, and the remainder of the hockey season, including 21 more home games this season at the Coliseum after the first of the year, is in jeopardy.

Frank Borrelli, owner of Borrelli's Restaurant in East Meadow, said hockey games typically boost his business by up to 30 percent on weekdays and 15 percent on weekends. To replace that revenue, he has increased his marketing and begun off-premise catering.

"It does affect our bottom line and could set us back because all of our other costs, like taxes and payroll, are staying the same," said Borrelli, whose family has owned the restaurant for 57 years.

The business owners' concerns come not only as the lockout continues, but also as the local community and county officials prepare for the departure of the team for Brooklyn's Barclays Center in 2015.

Islanders games generated more than \$60 million in local spending in the 2010 hockey season -- \$26 million for tickets, \$13 million for food and drink, \$12 million on transportation and \$10 million on hotels and retail -- according to a report by county economic consultants last year.

Nassau Comptroller George Maragos has downplayed the effects of the team's move and the lockout, saying the Coliseum was able to fill seats with concerts and other events during the 2004-05 lockout.

Barclays developer Bruce Ratner is preparing recommendations for transforming the Coliseum into a more competitive arena. He has said he will spend the first half of 2013 on his assessment.

While Nassau officials say data are not yet available on the economic impact of the lockout, East Meadow Chamber of Commerce president Millie Jones said the impasse likely will affect numerous area businesses, from bars and restaurants to doughnut shops.

"It's going to affect everyone on this strip of businesses" along Hempstead Turnpike, she said.

George Strifas, owner of the Colony Diner in East Meadow, said the lockout has taken a financial toll. Before and after games, the diner often was packed with fans, ushers, security guards and box office staff, he said.

Strifas estimated that over the course of the season, the diner could lose \$40,000 to \$50,000 in revenue from Islanders games while the wait staff could lose up to \$7,000 in tips.

"We don't see those people anymore," said Strifas, who has owned the diner for 21 years.

The National Hockey League locked out its players for the second time in eight years in September after failing to reach a new collective bargaining agreement. Last week, the NHL announced the cancellation of games scheduled through Dec. 30. Talks between the league, its players' association and a federal mediator are continuing. "Although we don't release specific numbers, the NHL affects our business by more than \$100,000 every month," said Walt Ensminger, general manager of the Long Island Marriott, located next door to the Coliseum. "This number is significant to our business model."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646560 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators face wrath of angry fans

By Bruce Garrioch ,Ottawa Sun

They are shaking in their skates at Scotiabank Place.

When this whole mess between the NHL and the NHLPA ends with a collective bargaining agreement both sides can stomach to end the lockout, it will be the fans the Senators have to worry about.

With Day 92 of the lockout arriving Sunday, many in the Senators offices are wondering what kind of financial hit they'll take when hockey returns, possibly in January, if at all this season.

There is no question, the Senators are going to get slammed financially.

While they are working hard to make sure they do everything they can to keep sponsors on board, the Senators are going to notice a sharp decline in the sale of merchandise this Christmas and then ticket sales when they do come back.

Instead of enjoying the holiday season with full buildings because of the Bell Capital Cup, the Senators will be left wondering if they'll get the greatest gift of all at this juncture: The NHL's return.

The Senators, like many other teams in the NHL cannot afford a second lost season in eight years.

This isn't Toronto or Montreal where hockey is a licence to print money. It is Hockey Country, but it's different here.

And, even if they do come back, the bottom line is certainly going to take a hit.

"You could certainly see a drop of 30-40% in hockey-related revenues for some teams," a league insider predicted last week, "and if that's the case, that's going to have a lot of franchises in trouble."

While fewer than 1% of Senators season-ticket holders have cashed in their tickets to ask for a full refund, those aren't the fans the Senators are going to have to worry about when the league and union come to their senses.

The Senators have 11,300 season-seat holders. The team has been keeping in touch with them during the lockout to try to keep them on board. If hockey returns, there will be some sort of enticement to welcome them back with open arms.

In a building that seats more than 20,000, the Senators still have a lot of inventory to move on game days. They rely on what the old Rough Riders used to call the "walk up" crowd, an endless tradition in Ottawa.

The momentum of a return to the playoffs last spring and a loss to the New York Rangers in a thrilling Game 7 at Madison Square Garden seems like nothing more than a distant memory as the lockout calendar counts ticks upward.

The excitement of acquiring hometown boy Marc Methot from the Columbus Blue Jackets in exchange for Nick Foligno on July 1 doesn't seem like such a big move anymore.

The Senators don't have to worry about the hockey fan, they have to worry about the casual fan.

Those are the ones who may be so upset they tune out the game completely and vow not to buy another ticket for a long time.

Senators owner Eugene Melnyk is one of the NHL's most committed. Even a league official noted recently he can't do enough for "his players". Somewhere in Barbados, he must be wondering about the damage to his business.

Smartly, Melnyk hasn't spoken since he got a slap on the wrist from the NHL for admitting to a Toronto radio station last month "they should be playing." He only said what everyone is thinking, but the league has rules.

Unlike 2005, the road to recovery from this lockout is going to be long and hard for the NHL.

The Senators will be one of those franchises challenged in a big way to get bums back in the seats for a shortened schedule.

That looks like a good option. The Senators just can't afford to have this season disappear completely.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.16.2012

646561 Philadelphia Flyers

Inside the Flyers: What would shortened NHL season look like?

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

Let's assume the NHL and the players' union reach a labor agreement shortly and that a season starts in early January.

That's a big assumption, but stay with me. I'm determined to talk (mostly) about hockey issues and not the collective bargaining agreement.

With a new CBA, we would have several questions. Such as:

Will a shortened season have any meaning?

It would make things more intense, from start to finish. If a 48-game season is held, each game will be more magnified because teams have about three fewer months than usual to get their acts together and earn playoff spots.

Who benefits the most from a condensed season?

Teams with youth. With a revamped schedule, teams would likely play about seven games every two weeks. That's a grind for teams with a lot of old legs.

Following Lockout I in 1994-1995, the New Jersey Devils stunned the Detroit Red Wings and won the Stanley Cup after a 48-game regular season, and several of their core players were in their early 20s, including Martin Brodeur (then 22), Bill Guerin (24), Bobby Holik (24), and Scott Niedermayer (21). The Devils also had a good blend of veterans, a group that featured Claude Lemieux (29), Scott Stevens (30), Stephane Richer (28), John MacLean (30), and Neal Broten (34).

The veterans had plenty left in the tank because of the abbreviated regular season, which started Jan. 20 and ended May 3. (The 2012-13 regular season is scheduled to end April 13.)

Should the NHL change its playoff format for just this season, enabling the league to play more regular-season games?

That's my suggestion, though based on what happened in 1995, the NHL is likely to play a cheapened 48-game regular season that will forever have an asterisk attached to it.

Again, assuming there's a labor agreement, a 56-game regular season could happen if one of the four playoff rounds were eliminated. Suggestion: Go back to the old system - one in which only eight teams made the playoffs - and have Stanley Cup quarterfinals, semifinals, and finals.

That doesn't figure to happen, however, because the league would rather have its usual 16 playoff teams instead of eight. Teams can charge more for playoff tickets than for the added regular-season games.

Ah, tickets and fans. That's an issue that hasn't yet been addressed by the owners and players: Who is going to pay for the \$300 million the owners have added to the "make whole" provision of the CBA?

In all likelihood, it will be Joe Fan. But if I'm reading the fans' pulse correctly, the owners and players are not going to have record revenue to split in the coming years, as they did last season (\$3.3 billion).

Jim McGinley, an auto mechanic from Northeast Philadelphia who played amateur hockey for 20 years, considers himself a diehard fan.

If he is a typical fan, the NHL is in trouble.

"Even if a season-ticket holder handed me a free ticket, I'd have to think about whether I'd go," McGinley said the other night. "I would want to know where the ticket was and if it included free parking.

"It's going to take me at least a year to get past this," he said of the work stoppage.

McGinley, 45, said things are different now than when the NHL had an abbreviated season in 1995.

"The economy is worse, and people can't afford tickets," he said. "And I'm not sure if [the NHL] is taking into consideration that almost everybody has a big-screen TV now. I can see close-ups from different angles and not have to pay crazy prices for food.

"It's not a bad option."

Inside the Flyers: The 92-day NHL Lockout Is Longer Than ...

The 72-day marriage of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries.

The nine-day marriage of Dennis Rodman and Carmen Electra.

It's getting close to the 107-day marriage between Nicolas Cage and Lisa Marie Presley.

- Sam Carchidi

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.16.2012

646562 Philadelphia Flyers

Sports in Brief: NHL union to vote on dissolving

NHL players will begin voting Sunday on whether they will grant the NHLPA executive board the authority to dissolve the union because of the inability to reach a collective bargaining agreement with the league.

Two-thirds of the membership must vote in favor of allowing the executive board to file a "disclaimer of interest," a source told the Canadian Press on Saturday.

The votes will be cast electronically over a five-day period that ends Thursday. If the measure passes, the 30-member NHL Players' Association executive board would have until Jan. 2 to file a the disclaimer, a critical step to breaking up the union.

Despite the focus of the lockout shifting from the board room to the courtroom, there is nothing preventing the sides from continuing to try to negotiate with each another. They met separately over two days with a U.S. federal mediator this week in New Jersey but failed to make any progress. No talks are currently scheduled.

Players have already missed five paychecks during the lockout that will enter its 14th week Sunday. More than 500 regular-season games through Dec. 30 have been wiped off the schedule.

**SOCCKER:** Abby Wambach scored twice to help the U.S. women's team close out the season with a 4-1 exhibition victory over China in Boca Raton, Fla. Wambach, 32, has 152 international goals, six behind Mia Hamm for the U.S record.

Megan Rapinoe and Sydney Leroux also scored for the Olympic champions in their third consecutive match against China in the finale of a 10-game Fan Tribute Tour. The United States ran its unbeaten streak to 23 games.

**SOFTBALL:** Widener seniors Shelby Mackintosh (Rancocas Valley), Jen Nance (Archbishop Prendergast), and Jody Salvatore (Williamstown) have been named all-American scholar-athletes by the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA). All three softball players are two-time members of the Middle Atlantic Conference Academic Honor Roll.

Nine Rowan softball players received the honor: junior Nicole Escudero (Cherokee), senior Ashlie Gaynor (Eastern), junior Stephanie Labas (Millville), junior Samantha Liedtka (Steinert), senior Jamie Minix (Kingsway), junior Lindsey Sampolski (Triton), junior Katie Trotter (Williamstown), sophomore Kristi Twardziak (Triton), and senior Nicolina Veneziano (Bloomfield).

**VOLLEYBALL:** Texas' Bailey Webster had 14 kills and Haley Eckerman added 12 as the third-seeded Longhorns swept Oregon, 25-11, 26-24, 25-19, to win the NCAA women's volleyball crown.

Webster, a first-team AVCA all-American, helped the Longhorns (29-4) on defense as well with four blocks. She was the tournament's most outstanding player.

Liz Brenner and Katherine Fischer each had 13 kills for the fifth-seeded Ducks (30-5), who were making their first title-game appearance. A crowd of 16,448 fans attended the game in Louisville, Ky., the second-largest for an NCAA tournament final.

**BOXING:** In Los Angeles, Leo Santa Cruz defended his IBF bantamweight title with a unanimous decision over Alberto Guevara. Santa Cruz (23-0-1, 13 KOs) won his third defense of his 118-pound belt in just over three months. Guevara (16-1) performed well despite taking the fight on three weeks' notice.

**BOBSLED:** Canadians Lyndon Rush and brakeman Jesse Lumsden took their first World Cup two-man bobsled victory of the season, and American Katie Uhlaender won the women's skeleton race in La Plagne, France.

Rush and Lumsden, a former Canadian Football League running back, had a two-run time of 2 minutes, 1.18 seconds. Switzerland's Beat Hefti and Alex Baumann finished second in 2:01.45, and Americans Steven Holcomb and Steven Langton followed in 2:01.48.

- Staff and wire reports

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.16.2012

646563 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL lunacy gets worse

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

It's Day 91 of the NHL lockout, and both sides are lawyered to the max.

NHLPA: Waaaaaaah! We'll go to court and prove the lockout is illegal.

NHL: Waaaaaaah! We'll get the courts to void all the players' contracts.

NHL fans: Waaaaaaah! We quit!

That, in a nutshell, is where we stand, folks: Two greedy sides still arguing about how to divide \$3.3 billion.

Do you still care?

The league and the players' union have gone to the courts \_ or are about to go to the courts \_ to complain about each other like grade-school kids. The players are in the process of voting to see if they should file a disclaimer of interest. If they do, it's their hope they will dissolve the union and file an antitrust suit against the league \_ and ask a judge to declare the lockout illegal.

The league has filed a pre-emptive legal strike, trying to stop the players from dissolving the union. (And it's not because the NHL loves the union's boss, Donald Fehr.)

If the NHL is unsuccessful in claiming the lockout is legal, it wants to have all player contracts nullified and declared void.

That, in effect, would make every player an unrestricted free agent.

Want Sidney Crosby? Claude Giroux? Shea Weber?

Step right up, bidders!

Repeat after me: CHAOS.

What we have here is a lot of posturing. If both sides spent as much time negotiating as they did trying to ruin the opposing party, well, we might just be playing hockey now.

Maybe all of this legal mumbo jumbo will speed up the process and lead to a settlement, as it did in the NBA last year, when it had a new CBA 12 days after the union filed a disclaimer of interest.

My guess: We have a settlement just before Christmas and we're playing on Jan. 5.

Will any fans still care by then?

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.16.2012

646564 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins prospect Morrow a work in progress

By Jonathan Bombulie

When his 10th week as a professional hockey player dawned last Monday morning, Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins defenseman Joe Morrow thought he was turning a corner.

He was coming off two solid outings, recording an assist and a plus-1 rating in back-to-back games the weekend before.

"I feel like I'm playing against my level of players now, rather than playing against men and kind of being a boy," Morrow said.

Simon Despres and Brian Strait were out with minor injuries, so Morrow was preparing to play with Robert Bortuzzo on one of the team's top two defense pairs.

The training wheels were coming off.

"Not just because of the (injuries)," coach John Hynes said. "It's really the fact that he's earned it, and he's at the point in his development where he needs to take the next step as far as minutes played and the types of situations he needs to play in."

As is often the case when training wheels come off, a crash soon followed.

Morrow was a minus-4 in the first 30 minutes of a 6-3 loss to the Albany Devils on Wednesday night.

Hynes said he didn't fault Morrow individually — the Baby Pens played poorly as a team — but the game was emblematic of where Morrow stands.

He still has some developing to do, which is not unusual for young defensemen.

Rob Scuderi spent more than 300 games in the AHL before graduating. Brooks Orpik did a 150-game apprenticeship. Even Kris Letang had a 10-game Wilkes-Barre boot camp under former coach Todd Richards.

Add the 6-foot-1, 198-pound Morrow to that list.

His play in the offensive zone is already close to NHL-caliber. The brilliant skating, predatory offensive instincts and big shot that got him picked in the first round of the 2011 draft are still there.

Coming into this weekend, he had a goal and four assists in 17 games, respectable numbers for a defenseman who turned 20 last Sunday and hasn't seen a ton of power-play time.

"The offensive side of things always came naturally for me," Morrow said.

In the defensive zone, there are plenty of areas to shore up.

"How to use his stick. Taking away ice when he's playing in one-on-one situations. Defensive habits and certain things he needs to learn down low that are just small little details that will help his game," Hynes said.

Morrow has received plenty of individual instruction in those areas in recent weeks, several times staying on the ice after practice to work with Hynes, Baby Pens assistant Alain Nasreddine and Penguins assistant Todd Reirden.

He's also been a healthy scratch six times while his defensive game gets a makeover.

"They weren't impressed with how I was doing things before," Morrow said. "They addressed it. I tried to get better, but I wasn't getting better quick enough. I wasn't progressing at the rate they wanted.

"So I really appreciate them taking more time and showing interest in me and putting in that effort."

Jonathan Bombulie has covered the Baby Pens for the Citizens' Voice in Wilkes-Barre since the team's inception in 1999. He can be reached via email at [jbombulie@aol.com](mailto:jbombulie@aol.com).

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.16.2012

646565 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins, players keep true to spirit of giving

By Rob Rossi

At no point did this three-month labor dispute between NHL owners and players seem sillier than this past week.

Coach Dan Bylsma and his staff did not accompany nine Penguins players Monday to Children's Hospital in Lawrenceville for the team's annual visit.

A day later, star center Evgeni Malkin remained in Russia rather than help Penguins executives and alumni take children shopping for winter clothes in Cranberry.

The Penguins Pond at Station Square opened to public skating Friday — without an actual Penguins player skating alongside diehard fans.

"The lockout has made for a lot of bad stories," defenseman Brooks Orpik said. "The fact that teams and players have to do this stuff on their own is probably up there for the worst, especially this time of year."

The NHL lockout, now in its 92nd day, prohibits players and team employees from having unauthorized contact until the league and union agree on a new labor pact.

So while commitment to community remains a priority for the team and players, they must go at it separately.

Keeping with tradition

There is an ongoing fight between owners and players over off-changing issues from revenue divide to contracting rights.

Jeremy Coast, of Franklin, faces a different fight.

"AML leukemia, but I'm winning," Coast, 15, said Monday.

His latest round of radiation should end around February, he said. By spring, he hopes to be back on his beloved dirt bike.

Coast is a fearless rider, despite two concussions.

"He might have brought that up," Penguins captain Sidney Crosby said, laughing. "I could have told him some stories."

Crosby admitted he had not laughed much between Monday and the three days prior following the breaking of negotiations in New York City.

Crosby has visited patients at Children's Hospital each of the eight Decembers he has spent in Pittsburgh. A few weeks ago he was unsure whether the tradition would continue.

Penguins employees always set up the holiday hospital visit, but because there is no contact allowed between players and team personnel, players were left to handle arrangements themselves.

"We absolutely didn't expect the visit to happen this year, and regrettably so because the kids look forward to it so much," said Ashley Van Alen, special events coordinator at Children's Hospital.

Matt Cooke, a famously reformed NHL bad guy, has used his free time during the lockout to make near-weekly visits to Children's Hospital. He told Van Alen that players wanted to keep with the tradition of the holiday visit.

With help from Frank Buonomo, a former Penguins employee, Cooke and Van Alen made sure 105 patients were visited Monday. Each child spent about 10 minutes with a group of players and received a Build-A-Bear stuffed penguin.

Buonomo declined comment other than to praise players for their desire to help. He witnessed the same willingness from players who participated in an Atlantic City, N.J., charity hockey game that benefited victims of Superstorm Sandy. That game raised more than \$500,000 and included James Neal of the Penguins and former Penguins Brent Johnson and Arron Asham.

Finding a way

Bylsma said he was "thrilled to see" players had visited Children's Hospital.

He spent Thursday there playing video games with patients. His summer hockey school, held at Consol Energy Center for the first time, raised \$19,900 that was donated to the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Foundation.

"It's important to have priorities in life," Bylsma said. "When you spend time with families, the kids, it does give you a pause for the people that may not have the best situations going in their life."

From their coach to majority co-owner Mario Lemieux, the Penguins take pride in their charitable outreach initiatives.

That has not changed during the lockout, even though the franchise has not been able to trot out players for the opening of a deck hockey rink in Banksville or the outdoor public ice rink in Station Square.

The franchise's biggest sponsors have continued to back charitable endeavors. Project Power Play, which is providing the region with 12 outdoor decks over a four-year span, is a joint effort of Highmark and the Penguins Foundation. The Penguins Pond is sponsored by 84 Lumber.

Dick's Sporting Goods was behind the Project Bundle-Up shopping spree for 25 Carnegie Elementary students Tuesday.

Penguins CEO David Morehouse joked that he was a "fill-in" for Malkin, the favorite player of best friends Dominick Thomas and Cayden Jenner, both 11. Morehouse spent nearly an hour with Thomas and Jenner, advising them on winter coats, caps, gloves and boots. Morehouse's advice: Go for the expensive gloves because they hold up better in snowball battles.

Thomas's coat, cap, gloves and boots totaled nearly \$500.

Players normally would have taken students shopping or attended deck and rink openings.

"There are things we are used to doing with the team that we just see as annual things, things that we're really happy to be a part of," Crosby said. "It's great to see that everyone's still involved, wants to keep doing it."

Crosby said he and the Penguins have "kind of in a roundabout way tried to make work" their joint-effort Little Penguins program that provides equipment to youth hockey players.

"Everyone, whether us or the team, wants to continue to help, to be part of the community," he said. "That doesn't change because there's a lockout."

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646566 Pittsburgh Penguins

NHL Labor: De-certification vote starts today

By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There were no negotiations between officials of the NHL and its Players' Association Saturday and, thus, no progress toward a new collective bargaining agreement.

But the process of determining whether the NHLPA will file a disclaimer of interest -- essentially, to stop representing its members -- will begin moving forward today.

This will be the first of five days of voting by NHLPA members, who are charged with deciding whether to give the union's executive board clearance to make that move, should it deem doing so appropriate. If the executive board receives permission from at least two-thirds of the voters, it will have until Jan. 2 to carry through with it.

The NHL seemed to be anticipating such a move, filing a lawsuit Friday in New York seeking to have "the ongoing legality of the lockout" that has shut down the league for the past three months reaffirmed.

In its 43-page filing, the league asked that all current contracts be deemed "void and unenforceable" if the legality of the lockout is not upheld because those deals were negotiated under terms established by the NHL-NHLPA collective bargaining process.

The NHL also filed an unfair labor practices complaint with the National Labor Relations Board, contending that the NHLPA's threat to file a disclaimer of interest constitutes "an unlawful subversion of the collective bargaining process" because it is strictly a negotiating ploy.

The union issued a statement calling the NHL's position "completely without merit," but has yet to file any sort of legal response.

If that happens, which seems certain, the NHLPA is expected to do so in Minnesota or California, both of which have courts with a reputation for being labor-friendly. The NHL presumably chose New York because courts there have a history of being sympathetic to management.

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.16.2012

646567 St Louis Blues

If and when the NHL lockout ends, what then?

4 hours ago • By Dan O'Neill [daneill@post-dispatch.com](mailto:daneill@post-dispatch.com) 314-340-8186

Whether the NHL labor dispute can be settled in time to salvage an abbreviated season is anyone's guess. But if it happens, what might the sports world expect?

"The hockey is very energetic, it was in 1994-95, but it had a lot of errors in it," Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said. "So from a fan's standpoint, it was

really, really exciting. From a coach's standpoint, it was like trying to plug holes in the dike. You just had to adjust all the time."

Some NHL players have been playing in Europe or for minor-league affiliates; some have not been playing at all. Some will be close to NHL speed; some will be far removed. Time will be short and by necessity, patience will be thin. Reputations will not carry nearly as much weight as productivity.

"The first thing you need to do is not assume," Hitchcock added. "The way you finished the previous season, the roles players played when you finished, all of that stuff goes out the window.

"The players are in various stages of conditioning. Some are 30-40 games into a season, and they're in their zone. Some will come in and not have played one hockey game. You just can't assume the same status quo will be there. You'd like it to be for the most part, but the realization is you have to coach players for the way they look the moment they hit the ice and adjust accordingly."

In a concentrated world, a third- or fourth-line forward by trade could open with a first- or second-line assignment. A primary player may not be ready for the responsibility and the minutes, at least at the outset.

For Hitchcock, the essential barometer falls on the defensive side, where the competitive coagulant is most apparent, where sputtering players will compromise.

"The biggest challenge coming back from something like this is, 'Where is your defensive game?' " Hitchcock said. "Because your defensive game dictates your competitive level and getting the players to buy into the defensive game is very challenging.

"It's all the little details, the hard things that you have to do. Because players have either played on a lower level, played on a big ice surface or not played at all. There are going to be very few players ... that are going to be anywhere close to the level that needs to be played."

Managing a roster also will be a condensed exercise. The schedule figures to be in-conference exclusive. Training camp will be a few days long with no dress rehearsals. A square peg of a half-season and playoffs will be jammed into a round hole of time.

Risks of muscle pulls and similar injuries will be elevated. Once they are in game condition, older players may rarely skate in practices, saving bullets for when they count.

For general managers, the transaction environment will be accelerated. Camps will be limited to players who might play immediately. The season will have a playoff personality. Winning streaks will be particularly inflating, losing streaks will be suicidal.

"The trading deadline is going to come so quickly," Blues general manager Doug Armstrong said. "You're going to have to be prepared to make your mind up on where you think you have weaknesses and how you have to shore them up.

"There could be a flurry of trades, or there could be no trades. Because of the compressed schedule, everyone is beating each other, everyone is going to believe they are in the race right till the end. But you have to compete at the proper time. LA got into the playoffs (last season) on the last weekend and then won the Stanley Cup. So, it's all when you peak."

As for how fans will respond, there is conflicting evidence. This is the third shutdown in 18 years for the NHL, the others occurring in 1994-95 and 2004-05. The lockout in 1994-95 wiped out the first half and the All-Star Game, but not the entire season. An agreement came 103 days in on Jan. 11, 1995, and the league launched a stunted 48-game schedule.

Hungry fans in most cities returned in full. Only two teams -- Ottawa and Hartford -- experienced a drop in the average gate from the 1993-94 season.

In St. Louis, the 1993-94 Blues finished 40-33-11. Brendan Shanahan and Brett Hull both topped the 50-goal mark, and a number of other "name" players dotted the roster. The team averaged 17,313 per night at the Arena on Oakland Ave.

When play resumed in January 1995, the Blues took the wraps off the Kiel Center -- now Scottrade Center -- and moved downtown. The team opened its new digs on Jan. 26, 1995, with a 3-1 victory over Wayne Gretzky and the Los Angeles Kings, with Hull scoring twice and newly acquired Al MacInnis adding an assist.

As the mini-season progressed, attendance increased by more than 2,000 per game (19,469). The team finished 28-15-5 and made the playoffs for the 15th consecutive season. The lockout had been frustrating, but hockey had traction in town.

Ten years later, things were dramatically different. In 2003-04, the Blues were 39-30-11-2 and second in the Central Division. Their roster included Keith Tkachuk, Doug Weight, Pavol Demitra, and Chris Pronger. They made the playoffs for the 25th straight season and averaged 18,560 in attendance.

But the 2004-05 lockout lasted until July 2005, and the NHL became the first North American league to cancel a whole season. In St. Louis, the collateral damage was enormous. Blues owners Bill and Nancy Laurie decided to ditch the hockey business altogether and put the franchise up for sale.

Competitive integrity took a backseat to consolidation as management thinned the herd of big salaries. The most striking move was the trade of perennial All-Star defenseman Pronger. When the league resumed in 2005-06, the Blues were a bargain-basement collection of marginal players and journeymen.

Mike Sillinger led the team in goal-scoring with 22 markers, which he managed to collect before being traded to Nashville on January 30, 2006. Weight was leading the team in points when he was dealt to Carolina the next day. The team won 21 of 82 games and missed the playoffs for the first time in 25 seasons.

St. Louis fans were emotionally gutted. They had lost a season to a lockout and lost their franchise to a fire sale. The result was the most dramatic attendance dip in the league. The average gate plunged to 14,213 in 2005-06, a drop of more than 4,000 per game. The following season, crowds officially averaged 12,520, the smallest in 21 years.

Should the current NHL season be saved, the situation seems most comparable to 1994-95. But it's hard to predict what will happen at the gate. Emotions are running high as the lockout drags on.

"The sad part about the whole deal is they've had so many stoppages over the last many years, it's like you can only cry wolf so many times," said Joe O'Brien, proprietor at OB Clark's, a popular sports bar and site for Blues postgame shows.

"What matters is they've been faithful to the sport for years. And here we finally have something going in St. Louis and we have nothing to show for it."

The Blues have climbed out of the late-2000s abyss. They were among the best in the NHL last season, finishing two points shy of the top overall record. .

The hard feelings seem especially unwarranted for Tom Stillman and local investors, who purchased the club in March from a New York-based ownership group. The change created an additional air of optimism and excitement. The new owners had no agenda when they got swept into this labor war.

It remains to be seen if Blues fans can forgive and forget.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.16.2012

646568 Tampa Bay Lightning

Vinik gives Lightning employees early holiday gift

By ERIK ERLÉNSSON | The Tampa Tribune

In a season in which the NHL looks more like the Grinch with each passing day, the Lightning are in more of a giving spirit despite the three-month labor stoppage that has shut down the game on ice.

Tampa Bay owner Jeff Vinik informed all full-time team employees on Friday they will be getting an extended paid vacation.

In an email distributed Friday morning, the Forum will essentially close on Dec. 20 and reopen on Jan. 2 – although the ticket office as well as the team merchandise store will remain open during regular business hours.

During the holiday shutdown, all affected employees – approximately 150 people are currently on staff – will continue to receive their regular wages, with the time off not counting toward their allotted vacation benefits. Of course, if a new collective bargaining agreement is reached between the league and the players' union before then, the extended time off will be cut short.

"Our ownership believed that an extended paid holiday at this time would be a nice reward for the employees that have worked so hard to transform the organization on and off the ice over the past two years," team spokesman Bill Wickett said.

"It isn't often in the sports and entertainment industry today that the pace of business allows for this type of break and we are happy to afford our people the opportunity to share personal time with their loved ones."

In addition to the time off, employees are being given an extra \$75 bonus funded by the Lightning Foundation with the hope it will be used to help those in need.

"We are asking that you use that money to purchase gifts for a holiday charity or perhaps a needy family close to your heart," Vinik wrote to employees. "Let's count our collective blessings while helping someone in need."

All this was possible because of the lockout that has been in place since Sept. 16, after the collective bargaining agreement expired. Vinik addressed the labor situation in his letter.

"I remain optimistic that we will reach an agreement with our great players that will enable the game of hockey to thrive in Tampa Bay for a very long time," Vinik wrote. "I believe the new framework will enable us to run a viable business in our world class manner while offering General Manager Steve Yzerman the resources necessary to ensure our team is competitive at the highest levels year-in, year-out."

Vinik closed out the letter stating, "I hope each and every one of you enjoys the holiday season and remains as optimistic as I do for our future."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.16.2012

646569 Toronto Maple Leafs

From the Lip: Ilya Bryzgalov is spending the NHL lockout in space, or something

National Post Staff | Dec 15, 2012 10:00 AM ET

In this edition: Ilya Bryzgalov hangs up during an interview, a dinosaur wreaks havoc at the Australian Open, and Kobe is on a roll. Here are the best sports quotes of the week.

"The thing is that now I am in the Mission Control Center you wrote about in our last interview. Astronaut suit on me. And you will understand that it disturbs me to communicate."

— Ilya Bryzgalov, to the Russian newspaper Sport Express, as translated by Google. After three questions, the CSKA Moscow goalie hung up, unwilling to talk about his poor play in the KHL or being left off a NHL-heavy Russian roster for upcoming games in the Channel One Cup.

"Training with the team today! I hope I remember everyone's name."

- Tottenham's Benoit Assou-Ekotto on being out with an injury since September.

"I don't even want to talk about that. Those distractions are getting old for me, to be quite honest with you. Do I think Ray Guy deserves to be in the Hall of Fame? Absolutely. But there's other ways of going about doing it, in my opinion."

-Vikings special teams co-ordinator Mike Priefer responds to punter Chris Kluwe's \$5,250 fine for putting "Vote Ray Guy" over a patch on his jersey commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

NHL labour stalemate renews Stanley Cup debate

"The game is about a mental toughness on top of a physical toughness. You know, it's not golf."

— Former Saints defensive co-ordinator Gregg Williams, testifying before Paul Tagliabue in the Saints bounty scandal.

"I thought I was going to get through this proceeding only by drinking coffee. I'm getting to the point where I need a Bloody Mary."

— Paul Tagliabue, from the transcript of the Saints bounty hearings he conducted acquired by AP.

"I never expected that he was going to tell us to the dollar what they had, and a chance to offer it. Our full expectation, the phone call was going to be before he signed, and certainly not after. Everybody's got to make their own calls."

- Texas Rangers GM Jon Daniels on being surprised by Josh Hamilton's decision to go to the Angels.

"It doesn't worry me as long as it doesn't crap everywhere."

— Australian golfer Peter Senior to Reuters about Jeff, a 20x8-metre animatronic dinosaur who is a new fixture at the Palmer Cooloom Resort where the Australian PGA Championship is being played this week.

"As soon as I got hit, I screamed. Like a man, of course."

— Redskins quarterback Robert Griffin III recalling the hit that injured his knee in Sunday's win over Baltimore.

"I don't know if he did. But that's weird."

— Nate Diaz, reacting to the news that Benson Henderson may have fought Diaz with a toothpick in his mouth during in the UFC on Fox main event on Saturday.

"All spring coach Sumlin would blow the whistle because the defence was close, and he'd come over ... spike the ball, 'God! They wouldn't have got me.' I'm like, 'OK, Johnny, sure they wouldn't have got you.' Come to find out they wouldn't have got him."

— Texas A&M offensive coordinator Kliff Kingsbury admitting that he and head coach Kevin Sumlin didn't really know at spring practice how good Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Manziel would be.

"I want to keep it right next to my bed. But I'm in college, a lot of people come through the house, and I live in a college neighborhood, so it may not be a good idea."

— Texas A&M quarterback Johnny Manziel, quoted by The New York Times, on where he planned to keep his Heisman Trophy.

"A cup? No. I think maybe I wore one when I was in peewee football. But not since. My mom made me wear one back then. I'm not even sure I had anything to protect, really."

— Giants linebacker Mark Herzlich to The New York Times for a story about why NFL players do not wear cups.

"If there was crying in baseball, I guess I would cry."

- Texas Rangers manager Ron Washington to The Associated Press on the trade of veteran infielder Michael Young to Philadelphia on Sunday.

"I'm very upset. When things get hard, you should get more determined, not shake your heads. It just seems when it rains it pours. It's like this cloud is following us around at all times. I'm one of the fastest guys on the team — and I'm like 50. What does that tell you?"

— Kobe Bryant, current king of the quip, to reporters after Tuesday night's loss by the Lakers in Cleveland.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.16.2012

646570 Vancouver Canucks

Sedin Twins surprise Vancouver Thunderbirds Triple A Midget team by showing up for practice (video)

By Jason Botchford, The Province December 15, 2012

The Sedins practiced with a stunned set of boys Thursday evening at Hillcrest Arena. As part of an NHLPA initiative, they slipped onto the ice and

danced with them in a series of on-ice drills. They set them up for goals, batted bodies against them along the boards, and drew up some two-on-two plays which always showcase the Sedins at their most marvelous.

Henrik Sedin misses hockey.

He misses the locker room, the trainers, the darkened, chilled, damp nights he spends driving to a rink to play.

He can't tell how much of his life has been sponged by the game, but he's sure it's well beyond the 10,000-hour mark which has gone from Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* to our collective consciousness.

Ten thousand hours of practice is thought by some to be what it takes to become a world beater. But not every hour is created equal. Just ask the Vancouver Thunderbirds Triple A Midget team.

They got the hour of their hockey lives this week when the Sedins, as part of an NHLPA initiative, slipped into one of the skates at Hillcrest Arena, and danced with them in a series of on-ice drills.

Henrik and Daniel set them up for goals, batted bodies against them along the boards, and drew up some two-on-two plays which always showcase the Sedins at their most marvelous.

When it was over, the young men gathered in the dressing room, and the Sedins told stories. The most timeless and counter-narrative dealt with their view on taking punishment on the ice. They welcome it, and encourage it. Take a run at them along the boards and those open spaces they are always seeking appear around the net. It's a welcomed trade off.

As they said, it instantly began challenging the young players' definition of that word toughness which can hang around in hockey rinks like a thick fog.

For the teens, it was a night they will never forget, and an etching that will grow in grandeur as the years pass by.

For the Sedins, it was a reminder of their youth; of their hometown; of their deep, long connection to a game they can't play right now.

"It brought back a lot of memories of when I was younger, especially thinking of us and when we were starting out, playing at night on an outdoor rink," Henrik said. "You'd be out there at 7:30 or 8 at night. We'd have big lights to light it all up and we'd be out there practicing for an hour and a half.

"You'd come home at 11 at night, and it was right to bed because you knew you had school the morning after."

When the Sedins were 15, they were in their hometown of Ornskoldsvik, Sweden. The summers were about soccer. But their winters were taken up playing for Modo's youth team and it was all hockey all of the time.

"In the winter, we were at the rink every night," Henrik said. "We would practice three times a week. We'd play once or twice a week. And on the other nights, we'd be there because our older brothers were practicing. On those nights, we'd play street hockey outside.

"It was this feeling like you couldn't get enough."

Now, the Sedins can't get any because of the lockout, other than those practices a few times a week with the UBC Thunderbirds.

"I absolutely miss playing. It's part of my life," Henrik said. "I miss going down to the rink. I miss teammates, trainers and I just hope it's going to start out soon."

The Sedins made an interesting decision heading into this fall. They could have stayed in Sweden or searched out opportunities to play in Europe for the lockout. Instead, they wanted to be in Vancouver. It has become a home, interestingly, to the point where they are at least considering the idea of retiring here.

"It's different from Sweden because that's where we grew up and that's probably where we'll go back to when we retire," Daniel said. "But it's getting tougher and tougher every year to make that decision."

Part of that is how accepted they have become in Vancouver, whether they are grocery shopping, or at the coffee shop or on the sidelines at a youth hockey practice.

"I never wanted to feel limited in what I could do," Henrik said. "I need to be out there shopping, picking up whatever. It's part of life.

"And that was the one thing that scared both of us when we first got here. We knew how big hockey was. You read stories how much attention is on hockey players in a Canadian city.

"I didn't know if I could ever go out and sit down at a coffee shop. But it's been fine, and that's been a nice surprise."

Daniel retold the story about how they spent a lot of time thinking about leaving in those first few years.

"I never thought we'd be this comfortable," Daniel said. "I thought we'd play out our first contract in Vancouver and go home."

"It was as tough as it ever was early on. It was tough to leave our hometown. Then, we didn't live up to our expectations. We wanted to make our fans, and owners and people happy because of our play and we didn't do that our first few years."

The Sedins often call those "the important years" and look back at them with no regret.

"I wouldn't want those years back," Daniel said. "We needed to come over and we needed to come over at that age. We needed to go through that. We look at hockey differently. We look at everything differently."

"We've learned to take things, the highs and lows, in a different way than most players who haven't been through a rough patch like that would."

"We know how to deal with things and get through things."

Henrik called the decision to stay in Vancouver through this lockout "very easy."

"What we wanted to do was spend time here as two regular families," Henrik said. "We wanted to try it out. Yes, we miss hockey, but it's been great to drive the kids to school and be a part of their lives."

"You drive your son to hockey practice at night, you drive around for soccer practice. You see friends you don't see during the winter."

"When you're a hockey player, they treat you like a hockey player. But now, I'm just a dad. Just a normal person."

"It's nice."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.16.2012

646571 Washington Capitals

Adam Oates's debut as Washington Capitals coach is on hold during NHL lockout

By Barry Svrluga,

Adam Oates should rise Sunday morning and drive to the top floor of the Ballston Common Mall's parking deck, pulling into his spot at Kettler Capitals Iceplex almost unconsciously, with so much else filling a mind that processes information nimbly. He should be reviewing Saturday night's game against Tampa Bay and thinking ahead to Monday night's against Florida, both scheduled for Verizon Center, both canceled. He should have 30 games as an NHL head coach behind him. He has zero.

So he comes to Kettler with no official agenda, no power-play problem that needs fixing and no star whose ego needs stroking. The few players who skate at the Washington Capitals' practice facility show up inconsistently, and even when they do, he's not allowed to provide conversation, much less instruction. He has no practices, no morning skates, no games. He is not a coach-in-waiting, but rather a coach, just waiting.

"Right now, we're sitting by the phone hoping something's going to happen," Oates said this past week. His mind, though, is not one to be idle, so he goes to the Capitals' Arlington training facility, watches video with his fellow coaches, tries to talk the game that he's willing to talk, according to General Manager George McPhee, "24 hours a day." But the NHL's owners have locked out their players, and there is no telling when his career will actually begin.

So this immersion into Washington's sports scene is, by no fault of his own, difficult. It was difficult 15 years ago, too, when Oates was traded from the Boston Bruins to Washington, held out when he arrived in midseason, then initiated a contract squabble in the summer.

He seems a quiet man, 50 now, his T-square of a jaw and a scar under his lower lip making him look like nothing other than a hockey lifer. As of last month, he is a Hall of Famer, even as he filled the NHL void by helping coach the Capitals' top minor league affiliate for six weeks. And up until now, he rarely met a transitional period that he couldn't make tumultuous. Not with sinister intent. But he is always evaluating situations — his own, his team's, the league's. And that leads to conclusions, conclusions he has little trouble disclosing.

"If it's wrong, it's wrong, and I say it," Oates said last month. "Sometimes to a fault, I say it. I'm mouthy in a different way, sometimes."

In a playing career that lasted 19 seasons, Oates was traded four times and pulled on the sweaters of seven franchises. He knows management — good and bad — and what a lack of communication can do to a player and a team. Because he isn't approaching his 31st game as a coach, but still awaits his first, the Capitals and their fans don't yet know his style for sure. But it won't be to bottle up candor, even if it stays in the dressing room between player and coach, even if it is delivered with a whisper rather than a scream.

"When you say something, you got to back it up," Oates said. "It's weird, because I'm a guy that really respects authority, chain of command, structure. I do. I'm one of those guys."

We should be learning, right now, about how those opposite pulls — an outspoken company man? — play out as the leader of a hockey team. Instead, Oates's past — as one of history's most prolific and savvy playmakers, as one of its most analytic minds and, simultaneously, one of its most willing cage rattlers — will have to serve as a predictor for his future as a head coach, whenever that future might start.

'I flipped the switch'

"I was kind of a punk," Oates said, and there are a couple of points from his youth in Toronto in which, had he taken another path, who knows what might have happened? He didn't always listen. He dropped out of school to pursue hockey.

"You like to say you would've landed on your feet," he said. "But you don't know."

A record-setting junior lacrosse player, Oates wasn't necessarily a hockey star, and might not have played college hockey in the United States had Mike Addesa, the coach at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., not appealed an eligibility issue to the NCAA to get him cleared to play. (He had played one game, without receiving pay, for a professional junior team.) "Without that scholarship, I'm done," Oates said.

He arrived on campus with few accomplishments — a scoring title in Ontario's less-competitive Junior "B" level — but with a cockiness anyway. "I think he was actually looking for direction," said Eric Magnuson, a junior at RPI when Oates matriculated as a freshman. He found it in Addesa, a disciplinarian with a temper who more than one former player has referred to as the Bobby Knight of college hockey.

"Once I went to RPI," Oates said, "I flipped the switch. I'm never going back."

His teammates and coaches at RPI soon realized what they had in their freshman center. There were reasons Oates wasn't drafted from juniors. He wasn't a particularly fast skater. He wasn't overly powerful.

"When I first saw him, he was a little bit disheveled," said Magnuson, Oates's best friend to this day. "I looked at him and said, 'Really?'" But when the RPI captains held practices that fall, without coaches, "he'd have two goals and three assists, and you never really saw him," Magnuson said. "He's one of those invisible players. But God, was he productive."

By his sophomore year, Addesa was so impressed with Oates's acumen that he began asking Oates about strategy. The results led directly to a career Oates believes he would never have had without Addesa: 83 points in 38 games as a sophomore, 91 points in 38 games as a junior, when the Engineers won the 1985 national championship. That spring, he signed as a free agent with the Detroit Red Wings. The next season, he made his NHL debut. And four years later came the move that shaped the rest of his career.

'Pay me'

"When I got traded, it hurt," Oates said. "It hardened me."

It was June 1989. Oates was 26 and coming off his best season to date, the first of 10 in which he averaged more than a point per game. The Red Wings sent him to St. Louis in a four-player trade. Thus began one of the defining traits of Oates's life: transition.

Oates did not yet know of the magic he would make with Brett Hull with the Blues, the back-to-back seasons with a total of 217 points. What he knew was how the move scarred him.

"From then on, it's business," Oates said. "Yeah, we can talk cliches all we want. 'We're gonna win for the 'Blue Note' and all that. And yep, I played 100 percent. But it's still business. Until you've been traded, you don't know what it's like on the other side."

Oates started to examine the financial side of the game. Hull, who scored 72 goals in 1989-90 and 86 more in 1990-91 — the third- and ninth-highest totals of all-time, so many of them off Oates's passes — was understandably the highest-paid Blue. Oates had signed a four-year, \$3.2 million deal, and in the meantime the Blues paid two players, Brendan Shanahan and Garth Butcher, more. Oates not only felt that was unfair, but believed it didn't offer assurances if his career was over in his early 30s, as many were back then.

"I could be retired in five years," Oates said. "I don't own my house."

So Oates did what so many athletes have done before and since. "I have to do what's best for Adam Oates and his family," he said in February 1992, even as he was single and — as he is now — without children. By that time, the situation had spilled onto the ice, with Coach Brian Sutter occasionally taking Oates off Hull's line. He engaged in frank discussions with fans on his situation, asking a teacher on a call-in radio show if she would turn down an offer from the school across the street to double her salary. "Of course not!" he said. Later that month, the Blues met Oates's demand and dealt him to Boston, which restructured his contract.

"Maybe the fact of how he ended up playing in the National Hockey League factored in," said Cam Neely, who became a teammate of Oates with the Bruins. "Maybe saying, to a degree, that he's proving people wrong. It's easy to sit back and listen to people say, 'You can't do this or that. Go off into the sunset.' Or you can say, 'I can do this. I'll show you.'"

It was not terribly different after Oates played parts of six seasons with the Bruins. He became a member of the team's axis with Neely and defenseman Ray Bourque — both Hall of Famers — but grew unhappy with the direction of the franchise. Neely was benched one game — forced to sit, in uniform, but not play — a move backed by management. Oates watched Bourque compete every night despite debilitating injuries. He considered it all unjust, and again, he wasn't happy with his contract.

"I'm like, 'Pay me,'" Oates said. "'No.' Well, then, I wanted to be traded.' [Expletive] you.' What's a player's option then? You got to mouth off to the press. You got to force the issue."

So Oates did, telling the Boston papers that the franchise wasn't treating the fan base well. That set the foundation for the trade that sent him to Washington, where he initially refused to report. Yet his squabbles, he said, never affected his play on the ice. "I could separate it," he said. "I really could." Teammates and opponents alike second that opinion.

"The interesting thing about Adam that I thought really separated him from a lot of players was how mentally focused he was," said McPhee, who inherited Oates's sticky situation from David Poile, who was fired as Capitals general manager after the 1996-97 season. "He never made mental mistakes. He always seemed to make the right play, or an even better play than you expected."

It all has something to do with the way he processes information, quickly and surely. That could be, in a previous life, playing the puck off the half-boards before laying it into the perfect spot — not just to a body, but right side for a right-handed shooter, left side for a lefty — to set up a goal. It could be now, as he prepares to combine his past as an outspoken player with his present as a leader of all types of personalities and abilities.

"I believe in communication," Oates said. "I can't be a hypocrite. I don't want to be a hypocrite as a coach. For example, we have a work stoppage. It happens. It happened this summer to the teachers in Chicago. It's life.

"If one of my players has a situation, I will talk to him about, 'It's your situation. As long as you show up for work, and you can separate it, great. If you need someone to talk to, I'm here. But it's your business.'"

That, Oates knows well, is the business of hockey. But when he retired, he didn't expect hockey to be his business anymore.

Always thinking

"I asked my wife," Oates said, "'Can I have two years to see how good I can become as a golfer?'"

When Oates retired from hockey in 2004, he was 41, and his right knee was sore. Twice he had torn the abdominal muscles on his right side. Doctors had taken a tendon from his wrist and put it in his right index finger, and though the surgical solution offered function, pain still shot all the way to his shoulder.

But he loved golf. As a Red Wing, he had befriended fellow Canadian Mike Weir, who went on to win the 2003 Masters. Once he retired, though, this was not a casual relationship with an avocation. "He was on that range for 12 hours a day," Magnuson said.

As he worked near his home in Palm Springs, Calif., the goal was to play competitively as a pro. But Oates began thinking about golf differently. He had to adapt to playing with all his ailments, so he learned about the body. He then explored how the body relates to the golf swing. After maybe 18 months, he knew he wouldn't be good enough to be a professional player, but he understood enough about the swing to offer advice to even elite pros.

"He's got a great knowledge of stuff, but he's not a guy who forces it on you. He's very analytical, but it's almost as much about feel — how it feels to you on the golf course or on the ice," PGA Tour veteran Brett Quigley said. "Golf-wise, I'd equate him to half Nick Faldo," the Englishman known for his metronome of a swing, "and half Seve Ballesteros," the flashy and creative Spaniard.

Over the past five years, Oates and Quigley have grown close — to the point that, more than a dozen times, Oates has caddied for Quigley on tour. He made his debut in 2010 in New Orleans, tracking the wind, talking Quigley into one club or another. He has focused the chatty Quigley on the practice range, and along the way experienced things completely foreign from hockey. One Sunday at Jack Nicklaus's Memorial tournament outside Columbus, Ohio, Quigley was near the top of the leader board, playing with Australian Adam Scott. Oates walked onto the first tee, surrounded by fans, uncertain even about opening a bottle of water lest he make too much noise.

"I had to put my shades on I was so nervous," Oates said. "It's such a cool thing for me because hockey is all noise. Golf is silent. The silence is incredible. It's really cool for me to concentrate differently."

Ostensibly, Oates will eventually have to concentrate as a head coach. When he interviewed for the Capitals job in June at the NHL draft in Pittsburgh, McPhee remembers thinking, about 10 minutes into a session that lasted a few hours, "Wow. I think we've got our guy."

The Capitals have him now. When that matters, nobody knows. He tries to do something regarding his new job every day, watching video or going over potential strategy. But you want his opinion on the lockout? "I'm not trying to solve it," he said.

Even with no hockey, he has other issues to analyze, because his mind just works that way. That, then, is what we know about Adam Oates, even before he coaches a game.

"I've always been a guy," he said, "who's thinking."

More on the Capitals and the NHL: NHL files class-action suit against NHLPA Obama tells sides to 'do right by your fans' Hendricks taking part in USO tour

Washington Post LOADED: 12.16.2012

646572 Websites

NBCSports.com /No surprise: NHL and NHLPA not expected to talk this weekend

Joe Yerdon

It won't come as too much of a surprise, but the owners and players aren't feeling too chatty with each other.

John Shannon of Sportsnet reports the two sides aren't likely to be in communication this weekend. After the NHL filed a class action complaint against the players' union late on Friday afternoon, this development isn't shocking.

The two sides spent last week working with federal mediation only to see things go unresolved. Meanwhile, the NHL has canceled games through December 30 and with the Christmas holiday coming up in 10 days, the clock continues to tick down. Meanwhile, the players will begin voting tomorrow to decide if they're going to file a disclaimer of interest.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 12.16.2012

646573 Websites

NBCSports.com /Players to begin voting Sunday to give authority to dissolve union

Joe Yerdon

The NHLPA's options in the face of the suit filed against them by the league aren't many, but they'll begin taking action on one of them starting tomorrow.

TSN reports the players will begin a five-day voting period on Sunday to decide whether or not to dissolve the union. Once the vote is completed — and it's believed they'll have the votes to support a "disclaimer of interest" — they'll have until January 2 to file it.

Should things reach this point, the players could see their contracts challenged by the league. In the NHL's complaint against the players, they said if their move to disclaim or decertify was upheld by the NLRB, they could move to void all current contracts.

While this all sounds like doom and gloom stuff right now, moving things into the courts could actually lead to a new deal being worked out sooner than not. That is if both sides aren't deadly serious about going through the courts to get this whole thing figured out.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 12.16.2012

646574 Websites

NBCSports.com /NHL will argue contracts are null and void if union decertifies

Joe Yerdon

The class action complaint the NHL filed yesterday against the NHLPA is full of legalese, but there's one aspect that brings a lot of interest should the players' association decide to decertify.

If you scan ahead to section 14 of the filing, linked here at Sportsnet, the league says that if the National Labor Relations Board declares the NHLPA's bid for decertification or disclaimer to be upheld, "all existing contracts between NHL players and NHL teams would be void and unenforceable."

Their reasoning here would be that since the contracts were agreed upon under the old CBA and the players would be effectively ending the collective bargaining process through decertification, there would be nothing holding it together anymore.

In short, the league has another hammer to swing should the players decide to match up with them with a court filing of their own. Then again, the quickest way to get around all the legal wrangling is to get a new CBA figured out in the first place.

Would the players want to call the league's bluff when it comes to their own guaranteed contracts?

Michael Russo of The Star-Tribune has a lengthy read going over all of this that's worth your time as well.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 12.16.2012

646575 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Spector on lockout: Sad state of affairs

Mark Spector

NEW YORK -- They are drilling down now, to record lows in our game.

Talk of decertification shifted to votes on disclaimers of interest. A lockout gave way to a lawsuit.

It's not about who is on the power play anymore. Just the power play. It's all about the power play.

Nor does our game does have owners and players anymore. As of Friday they officially became plaintiffs and defendants, respectively, a "Class Action Complaint For Declaration Relief," having been filed by the National Hockey League in a Manhattan District Court, by a roster of lawyers. File No. 12 CV 9133, for those of you who are scoring at home.

The boards of today's game are oak paneled, the only stick a gavel. There are no hip checks or toe drags, but instead litigation, and a new term we despise: caucusing.

The latest developments in this pathetic chapter of hockey history came this week, as the NHL Players' Association organized to basically disband, or declare a disclaimer of interest, an opaque strategy in which union leadership abandons the 750 members. They'll begin voting on Sunday, a sham of a vote in a sham of a season.

The NHLPA will vote unanimously to dissolve, allowing for a court challenge of the lockout. Donald Fehr will disengage from the union, but like the ejected baseball manager, he will still be phoning brother Steve with the pitching changes from behind his desk in the clubhouse.

In what now passes for gamesmanship in this lost league, the NHL beat its players to the courthouse Friday, filing an advance claim intended to thwart the disclaimer.

We could go far deeper into the legal ramifications of this despicable misuse of our legal system, but frankly it bores us to tears. A fall and early winter spent detailing yet another heels-dug-in labour spat in hockey has been utterly soul destroying for a writer, while trading the game fans love for the daily scorecard in a money squabble between millionaires and billionaires has left fans ambivalent.

So, where did it start? Why are we here, wherever history will one day record "here" to be?

Did it start in the 1950s, when hockey owners like James Norris began the relationship on the wrong foot by underpaying players, or blackballing those bold enough to speak up in an Original Six serfdom?

Was it the Alan Eagleson years, when a corrupt union head was in the owners' pocket, further sowing the seeds of player-owner distrust? Was it plundering Bob Goodenow's reign, with his "Score" website that ensured every single available dollar was bled from the hockey economy, to the point where the players were taking home a preposterous 75 per cent of revenues?

Is it today's owner, many of whom greedily collected expansion money from the same fading Sunbelt teams who so badly require their revenue-sharing help today? Of course, the owners say, we'll get you that money. As soon as we can extract it from the players' side of the ledger.

Or is today's player to blame?

Anyone who knows anything about major North American sports leagues realizes that central television revenues -- read: the big U.S. TV contract -- is the sole dictator of how rich a league can be.

Yet somehow our entitled hockey players have come to believe that making roughly 70 per cent of what Major League Baseball players earn is their right, despite the fact that hockey's U.S. TV deal is about 13 per cent as rich as baseball's.

They want more coaches, better hotel rooms, private team jets and generally to be treated like royalty. But don't ever think of sending them a bill.

No, no. The teams take care of that out of their 43 per cent of revenues, while the players inexplicably take home 57 per cent of the haul while never paying a bill and carrying absolutely no financial risk in this flagging venture.

Yet as fabulously entitled as today's player is, so is the owner disingenuous, signing dual 13-year deals on the eve of a lockout, then sitting down at the bargaining table and stating, "Man, these long-term deals are killing us."

And today's game? Well, it's on life support right now.

A lost season is very real now, and that would leave a smoking crater in many U.S. markets where once we spoke of "growing the game."

Of course, some say Friday's court filing will serve to bring the players and owners together more quickly, ironically coming after two days of mediation in which leadership of the two sides never once sat in the same room together.

It would be funny, Gary Bettman's operation, if it weren't such a disgrace.

A coach asked the other week, "What are we going to write on the ice when we get back? 'Sorry we f---ed up?'"

It is almost accurate.

Take out the word "sorry" and it would be perfect.

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