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NHL lockout doing 'alarming' damage to brand

NHL lockout: No talks scheduled as courtroom battle looms

Devils' David Clarkson will skate in Toronto charity game

NHL players expected to dissolve union, opening door to

Turris slowly passes time playing in Finland, eager for NHL

Stamkos leads NHLers into charity game as lockout drags

NHL lockout taking a toll on Lightning star Steven Stamkos

Senators prospect Stefan Noesen to miss world junior

Devils' Bobby Butler named AHL Player of the Week

anti-trust lawsuits and punitive damages against the I

By MARCIA C. SMITH COLUMNIST / ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ANAHEIM – Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau and assistants Bob Woods and Brad Lauer zipped up in team warmups and laced up their skates for a lap around The Rinks Anaheim ICE on Wednesday night at a public skate.

Then they took another lap. And another lap, going round and round, zigzagging past slower moving children and flailing-arms adults teetering on rented blades while "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" played.

Article Tab: Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau talks with a Ducks fan during a skate at Anaheim ICE last week at the Ducks Holiday Skate and Toy Drive.

Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau talks with a Ducks fan during a skate at Anaheim ICE last week at the Ducks Holiday Skate and Toy Drive.

Call this skate their "holding pattern," which is pretty much what everyone is stuck in while the NHL lockout continues into its third month.

"If this has been a preview of what retirement is like," Boudreau said, "I never want to retire."

Even though games have been cancelled through Dec. 30, the coaches still go into work every morning at Honda Center and make as many community appearances as possible to keep the Ducks visible somewhere, even outside of a rink.

They work out — "Don't laugh," Boudreau said — and study video, consider potential lineups and matchups, develop game plans and know how they would structure practice if it were held tonight.

"We've come up with Plans A, B, C and D and thought about every possibility to be ready," Lauer said. "But by noon, there's nothing more to do because there's no hockey."

This is a stir-crazy trio of hockey lifers who have never gone this long without playing in or coaching a game since their childhoods. Even the weekly golf outings for which they now have time have done little to ease their hockey withdrawal.

"My game has suffered because the golf gods know I shouldn't be on the course this much at this time of year," Boudreau said. "Ten days ago on the course, we told each other this was the last time."

Between shots, they were all too distracted by constantly checking their cellphones for the latest updates in the negotiations between the NHL and its players' union.

"Frustration," Boudreau said. "Frustration and waiting, that's life now."

Boudreau likened the experience of this lockout to a Disneyland roller coaster, his emotions elevating at the hopeful prospect of striking a collective bargaining agreement and then plummeting at the news of latest broken-down talks.

"We know all about the highs and lows now," Lauer said. "It stinks. But at least I got to put on the skates today."

In the absence of players, the coaches have become the official faces of the team, keeping busy with community outreach events such as Wednesday's Holiday Skate and Toy Drive, which collected 100 gifts for the Southern California Firefighters' "Spark of Love Toy Drive."

They also participated in the Maxwell Elementary "Power Play!" beautification project in November and delivered presents last week to low-income families as part of an Adopt-a-Family program through Costa Mesabased nonprofit Share Our Selves.

"We're lucky that we have the coaches and staff volunteers to be out there right now," said Wendy Arciero, the community relations director for the Ducks and Honda Center. "Without games and without players, we're having to be really creative to hold events, raise funds for charities and still show fans we care about hockey."

Because of the lockout, the coaches aren't permitted to talk to players or even watch the charity game that several Ducks, among them Teemu Selanne and Ryan Getzlaf, held on Friday night at Anaheim ICE to benefit the Children's Hospital of Orange County and the Junior Ducks.

"Personally, I would want to see it, but we have to follow the rules," Boudreau said. "I'm sure they're all itching to get back to playing just like we coaches are."

The downtime has allowed the coaches to spend more time with their families during the holidays, which could be a good thing.

Lauer said he has enjoyed being more of a parent during this time of the year. He also has gained a greater appreciation of what his wife, Daria, does to make a home for him and their two daughters, Camryn, 9, and Addison. 6.

He has helped carry the load, driving his girls to gymnastics meets and practices and going through fourth grade again to help Camryn with homework.

Lauer jumped at the opportunity to coach and run drills at a USA Hockey event last month at Anaheim ICE. Boudreau and Woods also have become frequent spectators at that arena, sitting among parents to watch their sons at Junior Ducks practice.

"Everyone's first question is always, 'When is the lockout going to end?" Boudreau said. "That's the icebreaker. I ask myself the same question every day."

Boudreau has grown restless with all this idle time, especially at home, following his wife, Crystal, from bedroom to kitchen to den to living room "like a puppy," he said.

"I can't wait until the lockout is over," Crystal Boudreau said. "With Bruce, it's like I'm 16 again. He's always asking, 'Where are you going?' and 'What are you doing next?' I tell him, 'Go to work!"

That's everyone's wish.

While this lockout continues, Boudreau and his assistants are skating in circles.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 12.18.2012

646601 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres players mum on disclaimer of interest, waiting for NHL to engage in talks

Because of lawsuits filed by the NHL and possible legal matters pending for the NHL Players' Association, several Sabres players skating in Buffalo didn't have much to say today about the state of labor talks.

They did, however, say they wish there were actual talks.

"We seem to have this trend where we put a proposal out and there's a couple weeks where everything goes real quiet, then there's some commotion again," defenseman Jordan Leopold said. "Hopefully, we get that commotion."

"It's tough that there's not much talking going on," forward Thomas Vanek said. "You would like both sides to at least communicate and work on it, so that's frustrating."

Vanek and Leopold were joined in Northtown Center at Amherst by Buffalo teammates Ville Leino, Drew Stafford, Patrick Kaleta, Matt Ellis and Tyler Ennis, who has returned from playing in Switzerland.

They are awaiting the results of an NHLPA vote on whether to allow the executive board to file a disclaimer of interest, which would then open the door for antitrust lawsuits. Voting reportedly began Sunday and will run through Thursday.

"I think fans would like to see hockey be played, especially the best players in the world," Leopold said. "Here we are parked on the sidelines again, the second time in seven, eight years, and it's unfortunate.

"Eventually it will subside and there will be a resolution. Hopefully, soon."

---John Vogl

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.18.2012

646602 Calgary Flames

'Dub Weekly: Feaster offers advice to world junior cut and Flames prospect Brossoit

Flames GM believes Team Canada brass had its minds made up going into camp

By Kristen Odland, Calgary Herald December 17, 2012

Over the weekend, Jay Feaster made a phone call to Laurent Brossoit.

The conversation — from National Hockey League organization to their 2011 draft pick — was regarding the stomach-churning blow dealt by Hockey Canada to the Edmonton Oil Kings netminder, the only puck-stopper cut from the 2013 national junior team selection camp.

And what the Calgary Flames general manager told him were the thoughts of many when the 19-year-old Surrey, B.C., native left Calgary last week back to Edmonton instead of boarding a plane to Europe as one of Canada's three goalies slated to compete at the 2013 IIHF world juniors in Ufa, Russia.

"When I talked to him Saturday, as an organization, we were very very pleased with what he did, what he showed, and how he played at this camp," Feaster said.

"And we were very, very pleased with what he did at (November's) Subway Series (against the Russians). I don't fault him in any way. I think he should leave there with his head held very high.

"As an organization, we couldn't have been more proud of what he's accomplished."

Brossoit, near flawless, had only given up two goals in three camp scrimmages.

However, it was the larger body of work that was considered in the evaluation process done by Team Canada head coach Steve Spott, goalie coach Ron Tugnutt, and head scout Kevin Prendergast. Brossoit had been lights-out in last year's Western Hockey League finale but, like the rest of the Oil Kings, he struggled at the Memorial Cup. Then, he, admittedly, struggled in his summertime showing at the Canada-Russia series but redeemed himself for Team WHL at the Subway Super Series and secured an invite to the national junior team selection camp.

Feaster and his brass had been following Brossoit all the way and felt Hockey Canada's decision had been made prior to last week.

"From my perspective, (after) his disappointing performance in Russia this past summer, I have to believe that Team Canada had their minds made up going into this camp," he said. "Because certainly, based on what he did against the Russians in the Subway Super Series and the way he played here (at the world junior selection camp), it was hard to believe he wasn't one of the three best goaltenders.

"Certainly, statistically, he was."

While Malcolm Subban of the Belleville Bulls was believed to have the inside track on the starter's job, he allowed three goals on seven shots in one exhibition game against the University of Alberta. That didn't look great on his record, but Subban (who has a 15-7-3 record, a 2.17 goals-against average, and .932 save percentage with Belleville this season) had sparkled in the summer and was named to the squad.

Subban will compete with Jordan Binnington, a technically sound St. Louis Blues prospect who plays for the Owen Sound Attack. Jake Paterson, 18, who didn't let in a goal the entire selection camp, is Canada's third netminder.

However — empathizing as a fellow junior hockey evaluator to another — Feaster could understand where Spott and the Hockey Canada brass was coming from.

"I understand that," Feaster said. "We all evaluate. Sometimes you'll have a player come up and score a couple of goals in the pre-season and the next day, you send him down. It's the old, 'Do I need to score a hat-trick or something? Why are you sending me down?'

"I certainly understand that there are a lot of things that go into it."

Rejection, of course, is an unavoidable life lesson.

But for someone whose work is defined by what happens in a crease between two goalposts, Feaster emphasized the importance of moving on.

For Brossoit, who returns to Calgary Tuesday night to face the Hitmen, that includes returning to the Oil Kings, trying to lead them to another Memorial Cup appearance, and, eventually, signing a professional contract with the Flames.

"You try to park it as quickly as you can," Feaster said. "Goaltenders all have bad games and their in such an exposed position. They have such a spotlight on them. If you don't have the ability to park the bad games, the bad news, to deal with the disappointment. I don't think you can rise to the level Laurent has risen to.

"We're not worried about him from that standpoint."

While Brossoit expressed confusion when he uncomfortably faced the media following the news last week, he returned and searched for positives.

After all, many great Canadian goalies before him have felt the Hockey Canada sting as teenagers and flourished as men in the professional world.

"I've been getting tweets with a long list of goalies who haven't made it ... Patrick Roy, (Martin) Brodeur. This absolutely helps with my motivation," Brossoit had told the Edmonton Journal on Friday. "I've had so much support ... more than I could ever have hoped for. Made it a lot easier."

Feaster advised him to turn that pain into motivation.

"I said to him, 'I know it's disappointing,' " he said. "But you need to adopt the mindset that every time you go out there for the rest of your career, you're going to show them why they made the wrong decision.'

"Twenty years from now, you're going to have people saying, 'Are you kidding me? You didn't make the world junior team?' "

ICE CHIPS... Saskatoon Blades forward Josh Nicholls is the WHL player of the week. The 20-year-old Tsawwassen, B.C., native had eight points (three goals and five assists) in four games over the past week while the Blades cruised to a 4-0-0-0 record.

THEY SAID IT:

"The beginning of day 1."

- Brandon Davidson (@bdavy3) an Edmonton Oilers prospect and former Regina Pats captain who began chemotherapy in Oklahoma City Monday. The 21-year-old Lethbridge native who plays for the AHL's Barons was diagnosed with testicular cancer on Oct. 31. "It's a reassurance that it won't come back, that we can put this thing to rest and get back to hockey," he told the team's website. "It wasn't an easy decision to make. Basically this was the best opportunity for me to put this thing to bed and move on."

"You should be watching lots of #WHL hockey this year. Plain and simple. Great product."

- Dave Dawson via Twitter (@DaveDawson7) reporter/host of Shaw TV Sports.

"Unbelievable feeling getting in for my WHL debut tonight. Thanks so much for all of the support and congratulations."

--- Calgarian Jake Morrissey via Twitter (@Jake_Morrissey) and fifth-round 2012 WHL bantam draft pick of the Kelowna Rockets who wound up in net against the Calgary Hitmen on Sunday. The Grade 10 student at Western Canada high school, and younger brother of Prince Albert Raiders defenceman Josh, stopped seven of 10 shots he faced in the 6-2 loss to the Hitmen

"We went out on the power play after my third and T.J. said, 'You know, might as well have four."

- Edmonton Oil Kings sharpshooter Michael St. Croix on his four-goal game in an 8-1 romp of the Regina Pats, a feat teammate T.J. Foster achieved in a 6-5 overtime loss to the Hitmen in Calgary on Oct. 7

"team canada!!!!! dream come true!!!"

- Portland Winterhawks winger Ty Rattie via Twitter (@TyRattie8) on cracking the national world junior squad

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 12.18.2012

646603 Calgary Flames

Calgary Flames scouting staff 'nailed it' in 2011

By Eric Francis ,Calgary Sun

CALGARY - Hockey Canada's recent world junior team selection camp helped draw attention to what may amount to a Christmas Miracle courtesy of the Calgary Flames scouting staff.

In short, the group that has botched drafts for the better part of the last two decades may actually have gotten things right a few years back.

And for that they deserve rare praise.

As it stands, all five picks from the Flames 2011 draft class are performing at significantly high levels.

While it's still early in their pro careers, the fact all five appear to be progressing rapidly may just provide the first sign the club's dedication to pouring more resources into scouting may actually be paying off.

Either that or head scout Tod Button is finally being listened to, which is what we are hearing.

Two of the five 2011 draft picks — second-round defenceman Tyler Wotherspoon and sixth-round goalie Laurent Brossoit — were Team Canada invitees who both had solid camps.

Wotherspoon surprised many when he made the team and Brossoit was never given a chance, as he was cut despite an almost flawless performance in his three appearances.

Another second-rounder, Markus Granlund, will play for Finland at the world juniors for the second year in a row, and fourth-rounder John Gaudreau is poised to be one of the top forwards at the American team's camp that also includes Flames 2012 draftees Jon Gillies and Patrick Sieloff.

Topping the list of 2011 draft picks is, of course, Sven Baertschi, who is too old to play in the junior tourney but was progressing quite nicely in the AHL until a recent neck injury sidelined him.

Given the lack of size of each player outside Brossoit, perhaps some of their futures will, in fact, be limited. But at this point it appears the scouting staff may have nailed it.

Now for more notes, quotes and anecdotes from a sports world wondering how anyone in the sports media could be comfortable calling an injury, loss or lockout "catastrophic" or "tragic" in light of the Connecticut shootings.

AROUND THE HORN

Not only is Nathan MacKinnon about to make Canadians proud of him on and off the ice this Christmas, but he'll do it for years to come. The projected No. 1 pick next summer is as respectful and well-spoken a young man as the Kid he's constantly compared to, Sid ... Interesting tweet from Toronto Maple Leafs winger Joffrey Lupul Sunday regarding the sports bar owned by the Leafs: "@realsports is not allowed to take reservations from Leafs players during the lockout but will continue selling our jerseys for \$300 a pop." One day later, he had a different spin when talking on Toronto's FAN 590: "Honestly, I wish I didn't write that," said Lupul. "I don't do stuff like that on Twitter but I was just frustrated and just wrote that. And obviously with Twitter you can't really take it back. So I felt bad." ... In light of the death of Dallas Cowboys' Jerry Brown Jr. at the hands of alleged drunk driver/teammate Josh Brent it's interesting to note the NFL does have a policy in place where every player can call a number in any city to arrange for a free ride anytime. Incidentally, the NHL has a similar network in place.

PARTING GIFTS

For the fourth month is a row, we'll repeat: There will be no NHL season ... Add Ryan Murphy to the list of Canadian players at the world juniors who will be allowed to stay even if the NHL returns before the Jan. 5 gold-medal game. Carolina Panthers GM Jim Rutherford told the Calgary Sun he'd grant Hockey Canada permission as soon as they ask ... Canyon Meadows and the PGA's Champions Tour missed a solid marketing opportunity by not finalizing its site agreement to host the Labour Day weekend tourney here this summer. While organizers expect the event will sell all 20,000 tickets each day, having them available for before Christmas sure would have helped the cause ... Safe to say the Red Deer Rebels responded well to Brent Sutter's decision to replace coach Jesse Wallin with himself. The Rebels won nine straight after the former Flames coach took over. He now plans to keep the job until at least season's end ... Good to see longtime Heritage Pointe golf guru John Wilson will now oversee Lakeside Greens in Chestermere.

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 12.18.2012 646604 Chicago Blackhawks

Hossa returns to Chicago, happy to be cleared

TRACEY MYERS

Marian Hossa heard those wonderful little words, "you're cleared," from the Blackhawks' medial staff back in mid-November. It had been a lengthy road for the right wing, who worked back from a concussion he suffered in Game 3 of the Western Conference quarterfinals.

Yes, Hossa is ready to play whenever the NHL is. And if the lockout culminates in another lost season, Hossa may look at overseas options.

"It definitely feels good to be cleared," said Hossa, who was skating in Chicago on Monday after spending the last few weeks skating in Florida. "Basically after all the testing I've done I feel really comfortable with myself. Right now, I'm skating with the guys, I'm feeling good, and when the season starts, I'll be ready."

When the season starts is, of course, the uncertain point. Monday was Day 93 of the lockout, with both the league and NHLPA looking at their legal options. As of now, there are no talks scheduled between the two sides. Instead, the NHLPA began voting Sunday on whether or not to authorize its executive board to dissolve the union (a la "disclaimer of interest"). Players have five days to vote. The league, meanwhile, filed a class-action complaint in federal court and an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

For Hossa, it's frustrating going through this again; he was coming off his final season with the Ottawa Senators when the 2004-05 season was canceled.

"It's definitely not fun," he said. "We're getting to that point where sooner or later we'll know if the season will start. We're all hoping for a season and we'll see in the next couple of weeks."

As frustrating as the lockout is, the first few weeks of it helped Hossa, health-wise.

"It's kind of funny; the lockout worked for me in the beginning because I didn't have to rush anywhere. I took my time, especially with the head injury," he said. "You definitely don't want to return early from that"

Hossa started skating with Blackhawks staff back in early October, about six months after he suffered that season-ending concussion from Phoenix Coyotes forward Raffi Torres. Hossa said those early skates weren't easy.

"I definitely had five weeks of extremely high-tempo practices with the conditioning and skating coach (Kevin Delaney)," he said. "But I felt really good afterward."

So now Hossa waits, as does everyone else involved in the lockout. He's ready to suit up for the Blackhawks, but if need be will play elsewhere. And he's not worried any lingering issues with the concussion.

"It's been a while. That's why I wanted to make sure I was practicing hard here with the staff and they did an excellent job. We took our time and I was at the level where I felt comfortable. Felt like I was before (the concussion) and that was important for me," he said. "When I got cleared, that was the time, if the season started, that I could play.

"In the next few weeks we have to get a result (on if there is/isn't an NHL season). Hopefully it's a positive one," Hossa said. "If not, I'll do the next step and maybe look for other options."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.18.2012

646605 Dallas Stars

Prospects report: Alex Guptill fighting to maintain scoring pace at Michigan

MIKE HEIKA

While there are plenty of great success stories with the Stars prospects, there are also some challenging moments for draft picks who hope to become future Stars. Forward Alex Guptill, who was taken 77th in 2010, is going through one of those challenges right now.

Guptill, a product of Newmarket, Ont., was scratched for a couple of games by University of Michigan coach Red Berenson a week ago for general attitude and bad practice habits.

"He's too good a player to keep going the way he's going, particularly his work ethic and his practice habits," Berenson told AnnArbor.com. "It was showing up in games."

Read the entire story here.

Guptill was the CCHA Rookie of the Year last season, when he was tied for the UofM lead in goal-scoring with 16 markers. He was off to a decent start this season with 4 goals and 7 assists (11 points) in the first 13 games, but Berenson clearly expected more. Guptill returned last weekend and didn't score in two games, but he appeared to play better.

In the long run, it could be a good lesson for the sophomore.

In other news, Brett Ritchie (Canada), Radek Faksa (Czech Republic), Esa Lindell (Finland) and Emil Molin (Sweden) are preparing for possible

appearances in the World Junior Championships, which begin in Russia Dec. 26.

Meanwhile, Matej Stransky ran his goal-scoring streak to seven games (10 goals in that span), while Mike Winther pushed his scoring totals to 32 points (14G, 18A) in 32 games).

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.18.2012

646606 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Daniel Cleary: Nearly everyone will vote to disband NHLPA unior

By Helene St. James

Red Wings player representative Daniel Cleary expects the NHL Players' Association to vote overwhelmingly in favor of dissolving.

The more important matter for players, though, is that the threat of utter legal chaos will prompt the NHL to blink long enough to agree to a new collective bargaining agreement.

"The way we look at it is, we've got 2 1/2 weeks," Cleary said Monday.
"Either we are playing, or we're not. I just hope that we get back to playing.
I'm nervous."

After months of fruitless negotiating, the NHLPA will vote through Thursday whether to disband. Cleary said he expected it would be a rout, basically because it's the only move the players had left. By voting in favor of a "disclaimer of interest," the players hand permission to executive director Don Fehr to walk away from the NHLPA, dissolving its status as a union. The other option was to decertify, which means players would walk away from leadership, but that's a far longer process, albeit also one with substance should it go before a court.

The goal of a disclaimer or decertification is that by disbanding the union, players can argue the lockout that began Sept. 16 is illegal and sue owners for triple damages. The NBA Players' Association successfully used a disclaimer of interest last year to secure a new CBA with the NBA and start playing on Christmas.

The NHLPA has to hope for a similar effect, but the NHL, led by lockoutsavvy commissioner Gary Bettman, might not buckle. The league already made a pre-emptive move Friday by filing a class-action complaint in federal court and an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board seeking a declaration confirming the ongoing legality of the lockout.

Once at least two-thirds of players vote in favor of dissolution, the NHLPA's executive board will have until Jan. 2 to file a disclaimer.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.18.2012

646607 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Daniel Cleary nervous for season as union votes on dissolving

By Helene St. James

Detroit Red Wings player representative Daniel Cleary is nervous about there being an NHL season.

Players are voting through Thursday about whether to approve a "disclaimer of interest," which would give NHL Players Association executive director Don Fehr the power to say the NHLPA no longer represents the players. Cleary said today that the vote will pass "overwhelmingly. If it's not 99.8%, I'd be disappointed."

If Fehr then chooses to have the executive committee withdraw, players no longer would be part of a union. Players could then take owners to court, suing them for triple damages, claiming that the lockout that has shuttered the NHL since Sept. 16 is illegal.

It's a path that worked last year for the NBA Players Association, during its collective bargaining agreement battle with the NBA. Faced with such a mass of red tape, the NBA blinked, and the sides reached an accord that enabled the basketball season to begin on Christmas Day.

That's not a realistic window for hockey. At best, maybe there is an agreement by the end of the month, provided the NHL takes the PA's threat seriously. In order to have the minimum 48-game season commissioner Gary Bettman has required, play would have to start in mid-January.

"The way we look at it is, we've got two-and-a-half weeks," Cleary said. "Either we are playing or we're not.

"I just hope that we get back to playing. I'm nervous."

The sides exchanged chess moves Friday, with the NHL making a preemptive move by filing a class-action complaint in federal court and an unfair-labor-practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board. In a statement explaining the decision, the NHL said, "In response to information indicating that NHL players have or will be asked to vote to authorize the National Hockey League Players' Association's executive board to proceed to 'disclaim interest' in continuing to represent the players in collective bargaining, the National Hockey League filed a class action complaint in federal court in New York seeking a declaration confirming the ongoing legality of the lockout.

"Simultaneously with the filing of its complaint, the NHL also filed an unfairlabor-practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board 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 countered with a brief statement, saying, "... Based on what we've learned so far, 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. We believe that their position is completely without merit"

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.18.2012

646608 Detroit Red Wings

Front-loaded deals on NHL owners' hit list

Gregg Krupa

Henrik Zetterberg's front-loaded contract would have been handled differently under a league proposal.

Bill Daly, deputy NHL commissioner, called it "the hill we will die on."

In the protracted search between the league and the players' association for a new collective bargaining agreement, the owners are adamant in seeking to eliminate the long-term, front-loaded contracts, generally associated with the 15-year, \$100 million deal Ilya Kovalchuk signed with the Devils in 2010.

But that fact is the Red Wings are largely responsible for devising the contractual formats.

And under a proposal from the NHL, believed to still be on the table, teams would be penalized for having signed such deals if the players stop playing before the end of the contract.

If the sanctions become part of a new agreement, they would affect the long contracts to which the Red Wings have signed Henrik Zetterberg, Johan Franzen and Niklas Kronwall — two of their three best forwards and their best defenseman.

It also casts light on their inability to sign Zach Parise and Ryan Suter, highly-prized free agents who signed with the Wild last summer.

Commissioner Gary Bettman, Daly and the league propose that all of the years and pay for a player signed to a contract longer than five years should be charged to the salary cap for the team, regardless whether the player is playing.

"While such contracts and cap charges can be traded during their terms, in the event a player subsequently retires or ceases to play, the effective cap

charge would revert to the club that originally entered into the contract," league officials proposed two months ago.

In other words, if Kovalchuk retires, suffers a career-ending injury or is waived, the Devils would be responsible for the hit against the salary cap. That would be true even if they trade Kovalchuk first.

Under the proposal, an injured, retired or waived Kovalchuk would cost the Devils \$6.7 million against the cap every year through 2024-25.

Cap hits

The same circumstances would affect the three Red Wings, and any player the team would sign to a similar deal.

The proposed collective bargaining language would partially stymie the intent of the Red Wings when they signed Zetterberg to a long, oddly-constructed deal in 2009, hoping it would provide enough money to secure the outstanding forward while helping them spread out cap charges.

Facing a salary cap that negated the propensity of owners Mike and Marian llitch to finance one of the highest-paid lineups in the NHL, the Red Wings brain trust under Ken Holland debuted the first dramatically long-term, front-loaded contracts in 2009.

They were not quite as asymmetric in value between the early years and later years of the deals as the contract for Kovalchuk, but they clearly were the mold for subsequent deals.

Zetterberg, 32, signed a 12-year deal for \$73 million, and he stands to earn \$7 million or more until he is 38 years old in 2017-18, \$3.5 million the next season and \$1 million in each of the last two seasons, when Zetterberg would be 40 and 41.

Under the proposal the Red Wings would have \$6 million charged against the salary cap, regardless of whether Zetterberg is still playing for them, retired or waived out of the NHL.

Franzen's 11-year \$43.5 million contract, also signed in 2009, would have a cap hit of nearly \$4 million annually through 2020. Franzen is 33.

And Kronwall's seven-year, \$32.5 million deal signed this year, has a cap hit of \$4.75 million through 2019. Kronwall is 31.

Had the Red Wings won the rights to Parise and Suter — the pair signed for \$98 million each, demanding they be paid the same and revealing their plan to play together — they would be on the hook for another \$15 million each year through 2024-25.

Wide implications

While Holland and other Red Wings officials are prohibited from discussing ongoing negotiations between the NHL and NHLPA, Holland made clear last summer that binding the team's hands in the future is one reason they were concerned about signing Parise and Suter.

Beyond Kovalchuk, some big contracts that suddenly look even more unattractive are those of Canucks goaltender Roberto Luongo and Islanders goaltender Rick DiPietro.

At least 30 players have contracts affected by the proposal. Most teams have one or two players who would be affected; some have none. The Red Wings have three.

Whether it is ultimately included in a prospective bargaining agreement is not clear, but Bettman has joined Daly in making clear the length of contracts for individual players and how much they can diverge from year to year are two of the major issues remaining for the owners.

Detroit News LOADED: 12.18.2012

646609 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings know there's 'small window' to salvage a regular season

By Ted Kulfan

Red Wings player rep Danny Cleary remains hopeful there will be an NHL season.

Troy — The NHL has gone from the ice to the boardroom — and now appears headed to the courtroom.

Members of the NHL Players Association began voting last weekend and will continue through Thursday to determine if they will give the executive board the go-ahead to file a disclaimer of interest and dissolve the union.

A two-thirds majority is needed to dissolve the union and allow the disclaimer to be filed.

With the disclaimer, players can file antitrust suits against the league.

"I speak for myself, and the (Red Wings players), we know where Detroit stands," Red Wings player representative Daniel Cleary said Monday after a workout in Troy, expecting full support for the disclaimer. "I just hope each guy goes out and votes and has a say and we can go and negotiate a deal."

Cleary anticipates the vote to be passed "overwhelmingly."

The NBA and NFL lockouts ended last season when threats of antitrust suits were discussed.

Cleary hopes the same scenario plays out with the NHL.

"I just hope we get back to playing," he said. "I'm nervous."

Last week, league officials filed a class-action lawsuit in New York federal court with an unfair labor practice complaint with the National Labor Relations Board.

Red Wings players have been skating in Troy knowing this could be a last gasp for a season.

"There's a small window there," Cleary said.

"This is it."

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646610 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Daniel Cleary says window for saving NHL season is small as union votes on dissolving

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

TROY – Detroit Red Wings forward Daniel Cleary has no doubt that players will vote overwhelmingly this week to give their union the authority to file for a disclaimer of interest.

It could be a major step in disbanding the NHL Players Association. And it could be another step toward the cancellation of the season.

"I just hope we get back to playing," Cleary said.

Cleary said he is "nervous" that the season could be lost. But, he has gone back and forth on this topic. He said on Sept. 24 that he feared the lockout could last more than a year. Then he said on Dec. 7 that he doesn't believe the season is lost by any means because the sides are too close on many collective bargaining issues.

But, the window is closing.

"The way we look at is we've got $2\frac{1}{2}$ weeks of hard skating, (then) either we're playing or we're not," Cleary said. "It's a small window."

Based on the lockout-shortened 1995 season, the sides would need to reach an agreement by around Jan. 11 and start the season by Jan. 20 in order to salvage a 48-game season. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has said the league must play a minimum of 48 games and finish the Stanley Cup finals before July.

The league's 700-plus players have until Thursday to vote electronically on whether to authorize the NHLPA's executive board to file for a disclaimer of interest, which it would need to do by Jan. 2.

A two-thirds majority is needed. Cleary said the vote will pass overwhelmingly.

"If it's not 99.8 percent, I'd be disappointed," he said.

A disclaimer of interest enables the union to dissolve itself and stop representing the players. It is quicker than decertification, a lengthy process

in which players walk away from the union. The end result is the same – players would have the right to file anti-trust lawsuits against the NHL.

The sides can continue to bargain throughout the process. NBA players filed a disclaimer last November and had an agreement two weeks later.

"Let's all hope for that," Cleary said.

Cleary reiterated that the sides are too close on most of the issues to cancel the season.

"There is some outstanding issues that if you look at it, it's not worth burning the season over," he said. "But still, there's some issues, like where's the (salary) cap going to be set at?

"They want \$60 (million), we want \$67.25 (million). If it goes to \$60 million, it'll be a big escrow (payment for players)."

Cleary said player contracting rights are "almost all settled except for max deals."

The NHL wants contracts capped at five years (seven years for a team's own restricted or unrestricted free agent). The NHLPA wants an eight-year limit.

"We can figure that out," Cleary said. "The variance, that's the only issue in the player contracting rights that we have left to figure out."

The league wants a maximum five-percent variance on the annual salaries of a contract. Players want a 25-percent variance.

Cleary said, "You can still get something done."

But, he added, "History tells me it could go a year, and it makes me sad, nervous."

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.18.2012

646611 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' opinions mixed on whether players union should be dissolved

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

TROY – Should the NHL Players Association dissolve itself in an effort to get players back on the ice?

Opinions were divided among some Detroit Red Wings.

Players are voting this week on whether to give their union's executive board the power to file for a disclaimer of interest, which would result in the NHLPA terminating its right to represent the players.

A disclaimer of interest is a quicker, less formal way for a union to disband than decertification. The end result is the same. Players would have the right to sue the NHL for antitrust violations.

Some Red Wings were asked recently about the possibility of decertification.

"That's the only avenue we have left," Ian White said. "They kind of painted us in a corner. Is it the right way or the wrong way? I'm not sure. We'll see how it plays out. But that's probably the only option we have left."

The process could expedite a labor deal between the sides.

White noted that the NBA players filed for disclaimer of interest last November and had a deal done within weeks.

"So sometimes it's a kick-starter to get a CBA done," White said.

Daniel Cleary was not in favor of decertifying.

"It's been brought up in media circles, but we want to get a deal done," Cleary said. "This is too close to burn the season."

Niklas Kronwall said he didn't know if decertification was the way to go, noting the sides came closer together during the last round of talks on Dec. 5-6, despite the acrimonious way they ended.

"Let's just keep digging away," Kronwall said. "We're so close. Even with the way things ended, there were a lot of things that got accomplished. I definitely think as of now, we have to move forward."

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.18.2012

646612 Edmonton Oilers

Matheson: NHL, players union doing their best to alienate fans, destroy a \$3.3-billion a year business

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal December 17, 2012

What's it like watching a professional sports league slowly kill itself?

That's what's happening to the National Hockey League during the prolonged lockout.

In Canada, NHL hockey is our addiction. But I sense an awful lot of fans have their noses out of joint with this lockout, and we're talking hockey country. If that's the case here and in Ottawa and Calgary, how do you think it is in Sunrise, Fla., where the Panthers play?

"I think we're all getting a little apathetic," said longtime player agent Steve Bartlett. "We realize this thing has turned ugly and it's going to play itself out in the next week or two in the lawyers' offices, not the negotiating tables. Unfortunate, but that's what we're stuck with."

Will there be an NHL season if there's no agreement reached by mid-January?

"No," said Bartlett. "Our worst- or best-case scenario would be similar to the 1994-95 lockout when we had the 48-game season. We're two or three weeks away (from blowing up the season or having a shortened season)."

The '94-95 lockout lasted 104 days, from Oct. 1, 1994, to Jan. 11, 1995. It was mainly about the owners wanting a salary cap to put a drag on player wages or, at the least, a luxury tax on teams that kept spending and spending. We understood that.

The 2012-13 lockout is now 93 days old, and 526 regular-season games through Dec. 30 have been cancelled.

Of course NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, a few years into running the league, thought he could also save a buck or \$20 or \$30 million for teams by eliminating per diems for players, medical insurance and telling the same players they had to pay their own way to training camps. That went over like a lead balloon.

In the end, the owners didn't get their salary cap or the luxury tax on teams and the players didn't have to rummage through their sock drawer for quarters so they could have a coffee on the road. They got per diems. The league did get a rookie salary cap, however, and players had to wait until they were 31 to be free agents.

There was no real winner for either side.

The second lockout in 2004-05 was also about the salary cap. The league wanted one because the players were taking about getting 72 per cent of league revenues in salaries and the owners were taking all the risks. The owners also wanted a rollback on salaries. They got the 24-per-cent rollback, but had to scrap the entire season because the players vehemently said no to a salary cap. Again, we understood those battlegrounds.

The owners thought they'd won in '05, but the salary cap's gone from \$39 million to \$70 million, so who's the winner?

The owners started this current fight back in late summer with an insulting, very damaging proposal, crammed with takes and no gives on their side. They told the players they should be taking 43 per cent of the revenue after making 57. The players, who are in the NHL because they're not called "soft," rallied around NHL Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr

Players have called Bettman an "idiot" and a "cancer" to the game. The owners have stewed over Fehr's passive-aggressive style of negotiating.

This lockout should have lasted three days, not three months. The business was raking in \$3.3 billion a year. It took them 2-1/2 months to decide how to

divvy up the money. Now, the players won't give in on the NHL term limit on contracts, and want a cap on escrow, among other things after agreeing to a 50-50 split in revenues.

The players have been doing almost all of the giving, with Christmas a week away.

If you ask most fans, they figure the players can hardly cry poor, however. The average salary is \$2.4 million a season. That's \$29,268 a game, for about 20 minutes work a game. Contrast that with a police officer, for example, who makes \$412 a day on average, or a Canadian soldier, who earns \$343 a day, as one angry fan in said in an email.

Now, the fight has left the ice and is in the courts, with the owners filing suit to get the lockout deemed legal. The players are about to dissolve their union so individual players can file anti-trust suits, claiming they're being denied work.

"A lot of this is manoeuvering at this point,' said Bartlett, who was actually on a shortlist to head up the players' union in the 1990s, before Bob Goodenow got the job.

The union's current vote for a disclaimer of interest (to do away with the union, which would allow players to sue, stating that the lockout is illegal) is a power play by the players to force the owners' hand.

"If a player sues and says he shouldn't have been locked out and he's lost a million dollars, a court could come back and agree with him and say not only is it \$1 million, it's \$3 million that the team owes because they'd have to pay triple damages. It's the threat of this (that) is perceived to be the main leverage point for the union," said Bartlett."

The owners maintain if there's no union, and no collective bargaining agreement (CBA) umbrella, all contracts are voided and everybody would be a free agent.

Wouldn't that be fun — seeing all the good players going to the highest bidder? Sidney Crosby could make \$20 million a year. Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins of the Edmonton Oilers going to the New York Rangers or Philadelphia Flyers? Steve Stamkos a Detroit Red Wing? With no salary cap, nobody would want to play in Columbus, Nashville, Phoenix or St. Louis. There would be no draft of top juniors, no guaranteed contracts.

Bartlett doesn't think it'll ever come to that.

"Somewhere down the road, we'll be playing with a CBA. I don't see the league ever starting without one," said Bartlett.

"That doesn't mean we won't have a few more turmoil situations before we get there. The reality is to play this battle out completely in the courts would take a great deal of time and that's not in the best interests of either side.

"The legal challenge will tilt one way or the other and it'll put pressure on the parties to go back to the negotiating table. That's what both parties know," said Bartlett.

If we have no NHL this season — I'd say Jan. 15 is the drop-dead date for a deal — I can see there being six fewer teams next season because they've lost too much money, which would result in the loss of 140 jobs.

"I have no idea if that would true or not, but every team has a fair amount invested in terms of the value of their franchise, even the worst of them, just to say they would walk way would be surprising to me," said Bartlett.

If NHL hockey comes back in the next few weeks, the logos on every rink surface should say, 'WE BLEW IT.'

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.18.2012

646613 Edmonton Oilers

Do the Minnesota Wild have better prospects in the AHL than the Edmonton Oilers?

David Staples

It's hard to beat the Oilers high-end talent in OKC, but the Wild prospects have done it almost every game this year.

So far the much-hyped prospects of the Edmonton Oilers have played the Minnesota Wild's farm team in Houston six times in the 2012-13 season. The Wild prospects have won five of those games, the Oilers prospects just one.

On Sunday night, the Houston Aeros again beat the Oklahoma City Barons 4-3, a score that flattered the Oilers prospects, as the Aeros outchanced them 23 to 8 (here are the player grades for that contest).

Now all this might not be in any way alarming for the Oilers. This is just a small number of games, all the games have been close, and it's also American Hockey Leagues action, and there's plenty of AHL teams that go with strong, older veteran players, which gives them an advantage over a team like the Oklahoma City Barons, stacked with rookies, especially on defence.

The only problem with this excuse for the Barons is that the Houson Aeros' roster is also full of young prospects.

In fact, it's fair to say that as outstanding as the Oilers top-end talent is in Oklahoma City, the Wild prospects in Houston are also an impressive and competitive group. I wouldn't trade the Oilers prospects, as a group, for the Wild prospects, but in a seven-game series I'd pick Houston over Oklahoma City right now.

The Aeroes don't have the star power of Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Jordan Eberle, Justin Schultz and Taylor Hall, but they've got a number of NHL stars and stalwarts in the making. Forwards like Jason Zucker, Mikael Granlund, Johan Larsson and Charlie Coyle, and defenders like Marco Scandella and Jonas Brodin all look to make their mark in the NHL. oilervsWild

At various times, Oilers fans have praised to high heavens the potential of the team's 2010 draft picks, Taylor Hall, Tyler Pitlick, Curtis Hamilton and Martin Marincin, but it could well be that the Wild get more value out of that 2010 draft. Hamilton and Pitlick are large players, and the Oilers are in need of large players, but at this point Zucker and Larsson, taken in the second round after Hamilton and Pitlick were drafted, look to be far superior NHL prospects.

Zucker especially impresses me with his skill and zest for the game. He has 22 points in 22 games. Hamilton and Pitlick, meanwhile, are struggling to put up any points in their second AHL seasons.

In drafting smaller, more skilled forwards like Zucker and Larsson, the Wild were following the Detroit model, investing in these smaller, more skilled players in the draft in the hopes that they would either grow physically, or their skill level would be such that they could nonetheless cope and maybe even thrive in pro hockey.

In the first round that same draft year, 2010, the Wild took Granlund, another smaller and highly skilled forward, but another who looks like he's got NHL written all over him.

This Wild bunch is a helluva group of players. They're going to give the Oilers stars fits for years to come, and not just in the AHL. I recall Zack Parise saying that he picked the Wild because he'd done a thorough review of their future prospects and came to believe this is a team with real potential.

Parise was right.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.18.2012

646614 Minnesota Wild

'See you in court' is only language NHL, union are speaking

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO, Star Tribune

Since the summertime, the NHL and NHL Players' Association have corresponded approximately 60 times.

That includes small- and large-group, face-to-face bargaining sessions, conference calls and two failed mediation attempts. That doesn't include the many lunches and dinners shared by the No. 2 men -- Bill Daly and Steve Fehr -- for each side.

Yet here we are, 94 days into the NHL lockout, games have been canceled through at least Dec. 30 and the 2012-13 season remains in peril.

The players are in the middle of a vote that would authorize the union to file a disclaimer of interest if it so chooses, which would effectively dissolve the union and pave the way to players filing antitrust lawsuits against the league.

In a preemptive action Friday, the NHL filed a class action complaint in federal court in New York seeking a declaration that the lockout is legal, and simultaneously filed an unfair labor practice charge against the NHLPA with the National Labor Relations Board.

Yeah, things are ugly.

"Things remain status quo with the union," Daly, the NHL's deputy commissioner, said in an e-mail to the Star Tribune. "There was no contact over the weekend, and there are no new meetings planned. We obviously would prefer that the players return to the bargaining table at the earliest possible date to see if there is a deal to be done.

"Ultimately, a deal will have to be agreed to, regardless of the forum. I suppose it is ultimately up to them to choose what forum that will be, but the union pretending it's not a union anymore certainly isn't going to expedite things."

In response, Fehr, the NHLPA's Special Counsel, e-mailed the Star Tribune: "There is no need for the players to 'return' to the table because the players have never left. It was the owners who indicated last Thursday that they had nothing more to say right now. We are ready to bargain whenever they are."

In the NHL's 43-page complaint that lists the NHLPA and 36 players -- including Minnesotans David Backes, Alex Goligoski, Ryan McDonagh and Jamie Langen- brunner-- as defendants, the league asks for all NHL contracts to be voided if the union files a disclaimer of interest.

Court battle looms?

"The NHL has made its move, a very bold move in court, but now it's the PA's move," said TSN legal analyst Eric Macramalla, a partner with the Ottawa law firm Gowlings. "I suspect they're going to file a disclaimer of interest and the very next day file a lawsuit, probably in the state of California, where it's more player friendly ... and ask a judge to say the lockout is in fact illegal and have it lifted.

"At that point you have to expect a battle over which court the case should be heard in. So this could get messy in a hurry."

Minnesota also is considered labor-friendly, Macramalla said. Last year, the NFL Players' Association filed a disclaimer of interest and eventual lawsuit in Minnesota. U.S. District Court Judge Susan Richard Nelson ruled in favor of the players and ended the NFL lockout, but her decision eventually was overturned by the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis.

So Macramalla believes NHL players would stay out of Minnesota because Nelson's order was thrown out.

Talks between the NHL and NHLPA broke off Dec. 6. After three days of meetings between a recast group of owners and players, NHLPA Executive Director Don Fehr portrayed to the public that the lockout was close to ending because of a "complete agreement in dollars."

Fehr did this despite a contentious end to talks Dec. 5 and a negative response from the league mere minutes before. This infuriated NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, who rejected the union's proposal, pulled the NHL's last proposal and railed against the union throughout a 40-minute news conference.

Lawsuit movement

The NHL remains steadfast that it needs a 10-year collective bargaining agreement (with an opt-out after eight years), 50/50 split of revenues and five-year maximum contracts (seven if a team is re-signing its own players). The league also won't accept the union's desire for caps on escrow and compliance buyouts, and insistence on a \$67.25 million salary cap that never decreases.

"The players feel like they're up against a cement wall, like there's no more room for compromise, and when that's your view, then you have to say, 'What tools do I have left available to me to extract leverage?' " Macramalla said.

That "leverage" could be dissolving the union and trying to have the lockout declared illegal. If that were to happen, owners could face hundreds of millions of dollars in damages.

Players hope that threat causes the owners to budge. On Nov. 14, 2011, the National Basketball Players' Association filed a disclaimer of interest. The NBA lockout ended 12 days later, the conventional wisdom being that the players got the owners' attention and accelerated a settlement.

The risk, though, is that if neither the NHL nor the players flinch and this hits the court system, the season coul be lost.

"Look at the NFL last year," Macramalla said. "The union disclaimed interest, the lockout was deemed illegal, then the NFL appealed, and they won. That took like four months."

Time already is getting tight. Bettman wants nothing less than a 48-game season, meaning games likely would have to start by mid-January. That means a CBA would have to be reached by early January.

"That's why no one really knows how this is all going to shake out," Macramalla said. "There's a lot of uncertainty out there."

AT A GLANCE

Last negotiations: In-person talks Dec. 13 in New Jersey. Bargaining conference call Dec. 14.

Next negotiations: None scheduled. There wasn't any contact between the NHL and the players' association Monday.

Games lost: 527 (all games through Dec. 30, plus New Year's Day Winter Classic and All-Star weekend).

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.18.2012

646615 Minnesota Wild

Wild's Bouchard reports he's symptom-free

Wild forward Pierre-Marc Bouchard, who suffered a season-ending concussion last year, says he has been "pretty much symptom-free" the past few weeks.

Bouchard, not technically locked out because he was not cleared to play by Oct. 11, has been skating daily with Wild coaches at Xcel Energy Center and practiced last week with the Houston Aeros.

He will see team doctors this week and hopes to be ready for training camp if the lockout ends.

"The last few weeks I've been pretty good, so I'm optimistic about it," Bouchard said.

Bouchard, 28, is in the last year of a five-year deal. He is the third-leading scorer (327 points) in Wild history and has played the second-most games (522).

MICHAEL RUSSO

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.18.2012

646616 Montreal Canadiens

NHL lockout doing 'alarming' damage to brand

ROY MacGREGOR

The league has a major marketing challenge facing it, whenever it decides to end the current lockout – and the longer it goes on, the worse it will get.

Such are the astonishing – yet, in other ways, not at all surprising – findings of a major survey conducted by Level5 Strategy Group, a survey that took place, significantly, in the slightly calmer period just prior to the recent press-conference histrionics in New York and the league deciding to sue the players' union to determine, bizarrely, that it is in fact a union.

An empty net after New Jersey Devils goalie Martin Brodeur lets in a goal by Los Angeles Kings' Drew Doughty (not pictured) during the first period in Game 2 of the NHL Stanley Cup hockey final in Newark, New Jersey, June 2 2012

Level5 is a 10-year-old company based in Toronto that has done "brand" analysis for such major enterprises as the NFL, NBA, 3M Co., Rogers Communications Inc., Canadian Tire Corp. Ltd., Second Cup Ltd., BCE Inc., Petro-Canada and many others.

Its expertise lies in in-depth interviews that determine the "emotional attachment" people have to various products.

In the case of the NHL and its players, the abiding feelings of the moment are betrayal at one end of the scale and utter lack of interest at the other. If you're looking for warm and fuzzy, get out a microscope – or, better yet, switch to curling.

According to Level5 chief executive officer David Kincaid, the survey was conducted not for the benefit of the league but as a tool that might be sold to the multiple corporate sponsors of professional hockey, in order to show what they need to tap into with hockey fans if they hope to regain their former good standing.

It will not be easy.

"We found damage at levels we have not seen," Kincaid says. "It's quite alarming, really.

"If anyone thinks that the lockout can end and everyone will come back to Happy Valley, it ain't going to happen."

The company's methodology varies considerably from public opinion surveys. Level5 claims to have mastered its technique through four years of pilot testing involving 30,000 intensive interviews, all geared at determining what basis a consumer has for choosing a particular brand. Obviously, such matters and price and availability play a role, but Level5 maintains the relationship is 50-per-cent emotional.

"The product is part of the person's identity," says Kincaid, who previously worked in marketing for Labatt Breweries of Canada and was a founding member of Corus Entertainment Inc.

Following the interviews – in the case of hockey, 1,066 people were surveyed – computer programs produce emotional maps called the "emotisphere" that illustrates the good feelings and bad feelings concerning a product.

The maps are divided, pie-like, into eight colour zones – red (fun), yellow (interest), orange (inspirational), brown (knowledgeable), green (trustworthiness), grey (satisfaction), blue (nurturing) and purple (friendliness) – and the farther a core emotion drifts from the centre the greater the concern.

A near-perfect emotisphere would be the Walt Disney Co. brand, the centre almost entirely red and yellow, the only outer concern a slight boredom even among those who generally like and admire Disney.

A disastrous map would be the one Level5 created following the BP PLC oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. It was the worst the company had seen – until it got around to the NHL this month.

The first surprise researchers found was passion for the national winter sport has slipped. One-third of Canadians polled consider themselves "passionate" about hockey, one-third is neutral on the topic and one-third has no interest at all.

"It surprised us," Kincaid says. "If we had done this study 10 years ago, 20 years ago, we would have seen half of Canadians or more say they were passionate about the game."

They found a lot of males have slipped into "neutrality" about the game – are now bored with hockey talk and feel they no longer relate to the game. Football – both CFL and NFL – is on the rise among those fans, who continue to be interested in sports.

"It's not a sacred relationship with hockey," says Behzad Ghotb, who led the analysis for Level5.

When they mapped out those who described themselves as passionate hockey fans, researchers found some core red and yellow feelings, but at the same time significant unhappiness, disappointment, confusion, irritation and frustration.

A great many feel "cheated" by the lockout.

As for neutral fans, the study found no red at all. On the outer edges, where brands don't wish to be found, the poll found dislike and, tellingly, boredom with NHL hockey.

The emotionally-charged red showed up in the final third, those who described themselves as non-passionate fans of little or no interest. However, the red was in the outer edges of the charts, indicating a significant and strong emotion: disgust.

"Hate can come from love," Ghotb says. "Anger comes from hurt."

From a branding point of view, NHL hockey and its multiple corporate sponsors are facing a huge hurdle, Kincaid says. The passionate fans are angry, the neutral fans turned off and bored, the mostly non-fans – the people hockey needs to attract if it hopes to grow – disgusted.

"Think what this means to the sponsors of hockey," Kincaid says. "For almost one-third of Canadians, you are wasting your time on them. You've lost them. They are not going to become even 'neutral."

As for those who do care about the game and still feel cheated, Kincaid says anyone who believes all the NHL has to do is come back and all will go back to as it was should think again.

"It's about damage control with these people," he says, "not about action on the ice."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.18.2012

646617 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout: No talks scheduled as courtroom battle looms

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

The closer the NHL moves toward a full-fledged battle in courtrooms rather than on the ice, the more likely the entire 2012-13 season will be canceled.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said via email today there was "no contact and no new talks scheduled" between league representatives and the Players' Association as the lockout reached its 93rd day.

Without a new collective bargaining agreement, commissioner Gary Bettman has already canceled 526 games through Dec. 30, as well as the Jan. 1 Winter Classic. He has said that 48 games are the minimum number required to play a partial schedule, which means the drop-dead date would likely be in early January.

"Hopefully something will happen that will cause a change in position," Daly said. "The PA knows where we are and what is needed to get the season underway.

"Time is obviously getting short."

The two sides met separately with a federal mediator last Wednesday in Iselin, but were never in the same room.

On Sunday more than 700 players began the process of voting on whether to give the NHL Players Association's executive board the authority to file a "disclaimer of interest." It would take a two-thirds majority to, in essence, give the okay to dissolve the players' union.

The 30-member NHLPA board would then have until Jan. 2 to file a "disclaimer of interest" declaring it no longer represented the players. Under U.S. labor laws it is not legal for business owners to lock out non-union employees, so the players could file an antitrust suit with the intention of having the lockout declared illegal.

Voting to give the players' executive board the necessary power will continue through Thursday.

Meanwhile, on Friday the league filed its own complaint seeking a New York federal court ruling stating that the lockout is legal.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.18.2012

646618 New Jersey Devils

Devils' Bobby Butler named AHL Player of the Week

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

Albany Devils right wing Bobby Butler has been selected as the CCM AHL Player of the Week for the period ending Dec. 16.

In three games Butler scored six goals with one assist for seven points and a plus-5 rating for the Devils.

Wednesday night vs. Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, Butler tied franchise records with four goals and five points, was a plus-5 and took a game-high six shots on goal as the Devils defeated the Penguins, 6-3; he scored once in the first period, twice in the second – including the game-winning shorthanded goal – and once more in the third. On Friday, Butler scored again as Albany erased three separate one-goal deficits and defeated Connecticut, 4-3, for its fifth consecutive victory. And on Saturday, Butler scored the Devils' lone goal in a 2-1 shootout loss to Providence.

Butler, who has 10 points during his current six-game scoring streak, has registered 10 goals and five assists (15 points) in 22 games for Albany, leading the team in goals, power-play goals (three) and game-winning goals (three). The 25-year-old Butler was MVP of the 2011 AHL All-Star Game and was a Calder Cup champion as a rookie with Binghamton in 2010-11, and spent the entire 2011-12 season in the National Hockey League with Ottawa, totaling six goals and 10 assists in 56 games. A native of Marlborough, Mass., Butler signed as a free agent with the Devils on Aug. 9, 2012.

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The NHL Network and NHL.com will broadcast the 2013 International Ice Hockey Federation World Junior Championship live, with all preliminary-round games being re-aired in primetime. The NHL Network-U.S. will also air Team USA's two pre-tournament games live from Finland.

An additional 12 games from the IIHF World Junior Championship, set for Dec. 26-Jan. 5 in Ufa, Russia, will also be aired live on the NHL Network-U.S. and then be re-aired later that same day, including six preliminary-round games and the entire medal round. A complete schedule is below. For the latest NHL Network listings, .

Steve Mears, who handles play-by-play for Pittsburgh Penguins HD Radio and covered the NHL Playoffs and Final last year for the NHL Network, will call all U.S. games in the tournament, with the NHL Network's E.J. Hradek serving as the analyst and Rob Simpson the rink-side reporter.

The IIHF World Junior Championship features the top men's hockey players in the world under the age of 20 and is one of the top events on the world hockey calendar each year. Participating nations include Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.

The United States has earned a medal in two of the last three IIHF World Junior Championships, including gold in 2010 and bronze in 2011.

USA Hockey is currently conducting a training camp in Tarrytown, N.Y., at the New York Rangers' training facility with 26 candidates hoping to make the final 23-player U.S. National Junior Team roster.

2013 IIHF World Junior Championship NHL Network-U.S. Schedule

Dec. 26, 2012-Jan. 5, 2013 • Ufa, Russia • Ufa Arena

Date Matchup Time (EST) Replay Time (ET)

Live Streaming

Thurs., Dec. 20

USA vs. Sweden7:30 p.m./12:30 p.m.

Sat., Dec. 22

Finland vs. USA1:00 p.m./6:00 a.m.

Wed., Dec. 26

Canada vs. Germany

Russia vs. Slovakia 3:30 p.m./4:30 a.m.

8:00 p.m./9:00 a.m. 6:30 p.m.

8:00 p.m.

Thurs., Dec. 27

USA vs. Germany

8:00 p.m./9:00 a.m. 8:00 p.m. NHL.com

Fri., Dec. 28

Slovakia vs. Canada

USA vs. Russia 3:30 p.m./4:30 a.m.

8:00 p.m./9:00 a.m. 5:30 p.m.

8:00 p.m.

NHL.com

Sat., Dec. 29

Russia vs. Germany 8:00 p.m./9:00 a.m. 5:30 p.m.

Sun., Dec. 30

USA vs. Canada

Germany vs. Slovakia 3:30 p.m./4:30 a.m.

8:00 p.m./9:00 a.m. 8:00 p.m.

5:30 p.m. NHL.com

Mon., Dec. 31 USA vs. Slovakia

Canada vs. Russia 4:00 p.m./5:00 a.m.

8:00 p.m./9:00 a.m. 8:00 p.m.

5:30 p.m. NHL.com

Wed., Jan. 2

Quarterfinal #1

Quarterfinal #2 5:00 p.m./4:00 a.m.

7:00 p.m./8:00 a.m. TBA TBA

Thurs., Jan. 3

Semifinal #1

Semifinal #2 5:00 p.m./4:00 a.m.

7:00 p.m./8:00 a.m. TBA TBA

Sat., Jan. 5

Bronze Medal Game

Gold Medal Game 5:00 p.m./4:00 a.m.

7:00 p.m./8:00 a.m. TBA TBA

*pre-tournament game

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.18.2012

646619 New Jersey Devils

Devils' David Clarkson will skate in Toronto charity game

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

Devils right winger David Clarkson will play in the RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge Wednesday night at the Mattamy Athletic Centre in Toronto.

That is the former site of Maple Leaf Gardens at 50 Carlton Street. The game is scheduled for 7 p.m. and will be a five-on-five format for 60 minutes.

Clarkson, a Toronto native, will skate for Team P.K. Subban, along with Jay McClement, John Mitchell, Chris Campoli, Carlo Colaiacovo, Tomas Kaberle, John-Michael Liles, Subban, Brad Boyes, Logan Couture, Phile Kessel, Tom Kostopoulos, Matthew Lombardi, Joffrey Lupul, Steve Ott, Peter Regin, Chris Stewart, Dan Winnik and Martin Biron.

Team Steven Stamkos will include Stamkos, Michael Del Zotto, Mike Komisarek, Niklas Kronwall, Dion Phaneuf, Kyle Quincey, Dan Cleary, Tim Connolly, B.J. Crombeen, Steve Downie, Chris Kelly, Clarke MacArthur, Matt Martin, James Neal, Teddy Purcell, David Steckel, Kris Versteeg, Wojtek Wolski, Jonas Gustavsson and Mike Leighton.

All proceeds from the game will benefit grassroots hockey causes through the NHLPA Goals & Dreams Fund and the RBC Play Hockey program.

The NHLPA Goals & Dreams fund is the largest grassroots hockey assistance program in the world. Founded in 1999, NHLPA Goals & Dreams has contributed over \$21 million to grassroots hockey programs and related causes in more than 30 countries.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.18.2012

646620 New Jersey Devils

NHL players expected to dissolve union, opening door to anti-trust lawsuits and punitive damages against the league's 30 owners

Outside of bargaining – the league and union did not speak during the weekend – that financial threat could be the union's only remaining leverage to force a deal to save the season.

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Time is running out to save the NHL season.

Litigation won't save the 2012-13 NHL season, but the threat of costly court proceedings could.

By Thursday, NHL players are expected to give their union's executive board the authority to disband the players' association through a 'disclaimer of interest' filing, and if the board acts on that authority by Jan. 2, it will open the league's 30 owners to individual player anti-trust lawsuits and punitive damages amounting to triple their salaries.

"The league will be responsible for three times all the salaries it owes to the players – that will be billions of dollars," said Jeffrey L. Kessler, a Winston & Strawn partner who represented both the NFL players and NBA players during their respective 2011 labor disputes. "If you were faced with a billion-dollar liability, what impact would that have on your desire to settle?"

Outside of bargaining – the league and union did not speak during the weekend – that financial threat could be the union's only remaining leverage to force a deal to save the season, by early-to-mid-January.

The problem is, if the NHL did not back down and instead went to court on the anti-trust claims, time most certainly would run out on the 2012-13 season regardless of whether the players earned future legal victories. That is based on information from sources familiar with the process, as well as precedent in cases such as Tom Brady v. the NFL, which took one-and-a-half months to receive an initial ruling in spring 2011 and ultimately was not decided in favor of the league until July 2011.

"I don't think litigation (on either side) will have the effect of making it more likely that a deal will be done," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told the Daily News in an email Monday, when asked if there were scenarios outside of regular bargaining that could save the season. "Given late timing, I'm not sure it plays a role this season at all. It may play a roll down the road if the season is cancelled, but it is our belief that would play out in a favorable way for the Clubs."

On Friday, the NHL filed a class-action complaint against the players' association in New York federal court and an unfair labor practice with the National Labor Relations Board. The intent was to uphold the legality of this lockout, prevent the union from disclaiming interest as a bargaining strategy, and shield the NHL from punitive damages.

To shield itself, the NHL wrote on page eight of its class-action complaint that "if the NHLPA's ... disclaimer were not deemed invalid ... and the collective bargaining relationship between the parties were not otherwise to continue, all existing contracts between NHL players and NHL teams ... would be void and unenforceable." In other words, the NHL wouldn't have to pay triple any player's salary, because no players would have salaries. They all would be free agents.

Two quick rulings in favor of the NHL also could force the union away from disclaiming interest and back to bargaining, but that would simply the leave the parties where they are now.

The NBA's owners and players reached an agreement to end last year's lockout only 12 days after the basketball players' union dissolved through a "disclaimer of interest" filing – the same move NHL players are on the verge of making. NBA commissioner David Stern insisted on Nov. 26 that the union's dissolving "was not the reason for the settlement," but Kessler said the evidence suggests otherwise.

"Just before disclaimer in the NBA, the league not only did not advance its proposal to the players, it gave an ultimatum that withdrew its proposal and said that it was going to reduce all of its offers because the players had not accepted," Kessler said, describing conditions eerily similar to that of the NHL in this lockout. "So the league was literally going backwards at the moment the players disclaimed. The players then disclaimed. The first thing that the league did was immediately say: 'Nevermind the going backwards.' The next thing it did is ... reach a litigation settlement which made dramatically different and more favorable offers to the players that it had said it would never even have considered before.

"Draw your own conclusions. The players in the NBA believe that disclaiming is what got them to a litigation settlement and ended the lockout."

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.18.2012

646621 NHL

Turris slowly passes time playing in Finland, eager for NHL lockout to end

JORDAN WINNETT

Santa Claus is not the only one living in Northern Finland.

Ottawa Senators forward Kyle Turris has made the long journey into the Nordic countryside, settling in Oulu to join Karpat in the SM-Ligga during the NHL work stoppage.

The SM-Liiga is considered to be one of a handful of the best leagues outside the NHL and as a result, a number of locked out NHL guys have made the trip over.

Fresh off signing a new five-year, \$15-million (all currency U.S.) deal in the summer, Turris was skating and training in Ottawa with fellow NHLers through August and September.

"I really didn't plan on going over to Europe at all," he said, "but gradually guys started leaving and we were left with only six guys to try and make a competitive skate. It doesn't really work."

Turris had never heard of Oulu before his arrival, so it's not surprising that when the club's general manager randomly called his cell phone out of the blue in early October, Turris had to do a quick Google search to make sure the team and place were real.

Upon consulting his fiancée and one-year-old golden retriever, Turris signed a deal and flew over Oct. 9.

Turris, along with roommate and fellow NHLer Jason Demers of the San Jose Sharks, made an immediate impact. Karpat was stuck in 13th place before the arrival of Turris, but has since vaulted into fifth place in the SM-Liiga, trailing Jokerit by a mere four points.

Although Turris admittedly hates the big ice and the style of play is "night and day" from North America, the 23-year-old New Westminster, B.C., native has collected 19 points (seven goals) in 21 games played.

Going over to Europe to play was supposed to cure the boredom of sitting around waiting for the lockout to end. But Turris quickly found out that other than Santa Claus and reindeer, northern Finland doesn't have a lot to offer.

"There's nothing to do here. Nothing," Turris says with a laugh. "If we're not at the rink, we're sitting around playing video games."

For perspective, the day of the interview the sun rose in Oulu just after 10 a.m. and quickly set shortly after 2 p.m. On top of the four hours of sunlight, it's also minus-20 C.

"I'm going stir crazy over here."

Many horror stories have been shed about the operation of the Kontinental Hockey League over in Russia in particular, but apparently the SM-Liiga isn't the most comfortable or professionally run league either when compared to NHL standards.

"The travel here is horrendous. It's worse than junior," he said. "We'll fly into Helsinki then hop in a bus for four to six hours, meanwhile, we'll make three stops on a six-hour bus trip for no reason. It's awful."

Although North America will never be mistaken for its culinary prowess like France or Italy, Turris quickly found out that it can get worse.

"The food here is awful," he explained. "On the road, we eat at truck stops. ABC truck stops. I'm not kidding. We file out of the bus and head off beside the highway for a buffet truck stop pregame meal. It's ridiculous."

The media operation isn't any more comfortable.

After his first game, Turris was taken upstairs to a podium in front of 100 sponsors in an audience looking at him not understanding a word.

"It's so awkward. They don't understand anything that you're saying, staring at you confused," he said. "I feel like a complete idiot, trying to use hand signals to help communicate."

The current NHL work stoppage has been especially frustrating for Turris, who was looking forward to his first full season with the Sens.

"Yeah it was frustrating. I love Ottawa and I think it's the perfect fit," he said. "I was really pumped to turn over a new leaf and start fresh with a full season."

When asked about the player-owner meetings and the recent negotiations, Turris had some interesting comments and ideas.

"I'm supportive of the NHLPA going into the [player-owner] meetings but I think it's an unfair playing surface," he said. "We're going into a room with billionaire owners who have made lots of money doing exactly this. We [the players] don't know the ins and outs like they do."

In terms of NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHL Players Association executive director Donald Fehr stepping aside to aid negotiations, Turris added sarcastically, "We don't pay these guys millions of dollars to not be in meetings. They should be there."

Asked if he had a better idea for some traction, Turris added that "the best case scenario would be to have a bigger meeting with all 30 owners, all players, Bettman, [NHL deputy commissioner Bill] Daly and both Fehrs [Donald and brother Steve, the NHLPA special counsel]. That way the NHLPA can be sure that all 30 owners are getting the message, not filtered information from the select leaders like Boston's Jeremy Jacobs.

"What I find so incredible is that the best hockey in the world is being withheld from millions of people because of a handful of people: Jacobs, [Calgary owner Murray] Edwards, [Philadelphia owner Ed] Snider and Bettman. They hold it in their hands."

Turris is eager for the lockout to end for three main reasons: to see sunlight again, to see family and friends and to start working with the Capital City Condors charity once again in Ottawa.

"I really miss being involved with the Condors program," he said. "I can't wait to get back and help out."

Turris has clearly carved a nice home in Ottawa since his departure from Phoenix, now he just needs a season to get started.

"It's really exciting in Ottawa because we are going to have such a good, young team. We have five years to make good things happen."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.18.2012

646622 NHL

Stamkos leads NHLers into charity game as lockout drags on

JAMES MIRTLE

He wanted to talk about the game, getting back on the ice and benefiting charity with Wednesday's game between locked out players in Toronto.

But the questions facing Steven Stamkos on Monday were all on the painfully familiar off-ice topics the young Tampa Bay Lightning star has grown accustomed to the past few months.

"Steve, on the labour front, how do you feel about the NHLPA possibly filing a disclaimer of interest?" was one.

"What is your message to the owners?" was another.

Stamkos didn't bite.

"I know everyone probably wants to ask about that," Stamkos said quietly. "Right now my focus is on this event. For me, it's trying to stay informed and focusing on this."

The 2012-13 season was to be Stamkos's fifth in the league and a follow up to a third-straight 90-point season in which he led the league by a wide margin with 60 goals.

Still just 22 years old, he is one of a handful of this generation's superstars that is missing out on one of his peak seasons (not to mention \$8-million in salary) and not playing any competitive hockey for the first time he can remember.

And he's not alone. Other than another charity event in Atlantic City last month, Wednesday's game featuring Stamkos and 38 other locked out NHLers will be their first taste of action against top end talent since the end of last season.

Instead, players have had to keep busy playing mainly with beer leaguers, including Stamkos joining his father, Chris, in his Thursday night games near his hometown of Markham, Ont.

The two time Rocket Richard Trophy winner admitted he has had to take it easy on the old-timers.

"There's a couple times when I've had to take a little mustard off the shot," Stamkos said, adding that former teammate Steve Downie and Leafs alum Dan Daoust play in their games.

"But it's great for my Dad and his buddies. A lot of them haven't had the chance to skate with NHL players before. It's fun for me to get out there and skate with those guys as well."

As for getting Stamkos and Co. back on NHL ice, that doesn't appear to be coming any time soon.

The players are in the midst of a vote that would give the NHLPA's board the authority to dissolve the union, a manoeuvre that would allow players to mount a counterattack in court after the league filed a class-action suit against players late last Friday.

That vote – which requires two-thirds of all NHLPA members saying yes to put it through – will conclude Friday, something that appears to have put the league and players in a holding pattern in terms of future talks.

A new collective agreement will likely have to be settled by mid-January to play a partial season, leaving roughly four weeks for some real progress to be made.

"I thought we'd be able to work something out [sooner]," said Stamkos, who has received plenty of offers to play in Europe but has decided to stay in the Toronto area and train with Gary Roberts in the hopes an abbreviated season will begin soon.

"The guys [like Roberts] that have been through this before, they told me it's a long process. There's so many ups and downs. For me obviously, it's my first one, so you just try and stay informed and learn from it."

So, for now, playing in charity and beer league games will have to do.

"It's frustrating," he said. "You do something your whole life, and you don't really think anything of it.

"You can play pickup games, you can play shinny games, on an outdoor rink, but it's just that nothing matches getting into an [NHL] game atmosphere."

Wednesday's game will be played at the former home of Maple Leaf Gardens and is expected to generate at least \$50,000 in addition to what sponsors contribute to grassroots hockey. The building is on the verge of selling out, which shouldn't be a surprise given it holds just 2,600 seats and a few hundred standing room. The event has also attracted major media attention, with most major networks and publications expected to attend.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.18.2012

646623 NHL

NHL lockout taking a toll on Lightning star Steven Stamkos

By Michael Traikos

TORONTO — Steven Stamkos said he plays hockey almost every day. But the thing he misses the most during this NHL lockout is playing hockey.

Real hockey, that is. Not the kind that Stamkos plays on Thursday nights with his dad, or the kind that he and P.K. Subban are organizing with 30 other out-of-work NHLers at the old Maple Leaf Gardens this week. Stamkos is talking about the kind of where you could get hurt if you don't keep your head up, where you have to backcheck, and where the score actually matters.

It has been more than eight months since he played a game like that. And the time away is taking a mental toll on the 22-year-old sniper.

"Like I say, it's frustrating," Stamkos said Monday in advance of Wednesday's RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge at the Mattamy Athletic Centre, formerly Maple Leaf Gardens. "You do something for your whole life and you don't really think anything of it. Everything you do is geared towards playing hockey. Now that you don't have that, it's tough."

This lockout is tough for a player like Stamkos, who are not only missing a pay cheque but missing time building what his fans would hope is a Hall of Fame career.

Stamkos, who scored 60 goals last season and also led the league in goal-scoring two years ago, was on his way to becoming one of the top scorers in league history. But the lockout might cost him of another 50- or 60-goal season.

A similar situation occurred to Pavel Bure, who scored 60 goals in 1992-93 and another 60 in 1993-94, but finished with only 20 goals in a strike-shortened 1994-95. The Russian Rocket finished his career 63 goals short of 500.

Stamkos, who has 179 career goals, might have reached the 200-goal mark by now. Instead, he remains in perpetual off-season training mode for a season that might not come. His days are spent working out with Gary Roberts, practising with an on-ice skills coach and skating with the Oshawa Generals and whatever other team will take him. What he has not been able to replicate is actual competition.

"I've just been trying to stay sharp," he said. "I messaged Marty St. Louis the other day saying, 'Hopefully we get back because I'm getting too big in the gym working with [trainer] Gary [Roberts].'"

You do something for your whole life and you don't really think anything of it. Everything you do is geared towards playing hockey. Now that you don't have that, it's tough

Stamkos said he had options to play in Europe, but decided against it because he was worried about possible injury and heard of negative experiences from other players. He also did not believe the stalemate would last this long.

And so, Stamkos will have to be content with playing beer league hockey and against faux competition in a no-contact charity game. It is not real hockey. But it is the best he can come up with.

National Post LOADED: 12.18.2012

646624 Ottawa Senators

Players hope union move leads to deal

Boyle prepares in Ottawa for NHL return

By ken warren, Ottawa Citizen December 17, 2012

Dan Boyle offered the smallest glimmer of optimism Monday for NHL fans hoping the lockout will end soon.

Boyle, the Ottawa native and star San Jose Sharks defenceman, brought his equipment from California for his 10-day holiday stay back home. Just in case he needs to pick up his practice pace in a hurry.

"That's why I'm skating here," Boyle said following a workout with fellow NHL players and skaters with the Carleton University Ravens. "If I knew the season was going to be over, I probably wouldn't be skating. I'm just crossing my fingers and hoping common sense will prevail and we can find our way back on the rails here."

Throughout the lockout, Boyle, 36, has been outspoken about the need for both the owners and the players' association to work together to salvage the season. He toned down his comments somewhat on Monday, but he remains aggravated that the sides can't take the final steps toward each other to complete a deal.

The latest wrinkle came over the weekend, when the NHLPA asked players to vote on whether to file a disclaimer of interest, meaning the union would no longer represent players.

If there was no union, the argument goes, then the existing collective bargaining agreement would not apply. By extension, the NHL lockout would be invalid because owners would be breaking anti-trust laws by running a monopoly to control the workplace.

The NHL, however, filed a lawsuit late Friday, asking courts in New York to declare the lockout legal. In addition, the NHL has filed an unfair labour claim against the players' association for not bargaining in good faith.

It's a complicated process with potentially huge consequences, but Boyle says the NHLPA vote is designed to make something happen.

"We all want to play," said Boyle, who has two years and \$13.2 million remaining on his contract with San Jose. "We've got to do what we've got to do. The frustrating part for everybody is we know the sides are just so close. It's just crazy to think we can't find common ground there, but I think the fact that (through) the lockout, (the NHL) has had a take it or leave it kind of attitude, it has been hard to negotiate with that."

Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson, back on the ice Monday after playing in a charity game in Kemptville Sunday to benefit farmers, says the disclaimer of interest vote is a necessary step because players are "out of options" in the negotiation battle.

"Every hockey fan has that on their Christmas list, to get a solution to this lockout," Alfredsson said. "It has been a very tough one. After their first offer, where I thought they set the tone, I thought it would be awhile, but I didn't think it would be this long."

Alfredsson says the players understand the potential long-term rinks of their vote.

"If that wasn't the case, I think we would have done that a couple of months ago," he said. "It's not something where we just say, 'let's do this.' I'm sure the (NHLPA) executive board has thought long and hard about this."

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.18.2012

646625 Ottawa Senators

Noesen won't play at world juniors

By Ken Warren, Ottawa Citizen December 17, 2012

Stefan Noesen is staying in the United States for Christmas, after all.

The International Ice Hockey Federation ruled Monday that Noesen, a star with the Plymouth Whalers and a top Ottawa Senators prospect, is ineligible to represent the USA at the world junior championships in Russia. The IIHF

upheld the 10-game suspension Noesen received for a charging incident against Tyler Hore of the Oshawa Generals on Dec. 8. Noesen has served three games of the suspension with Plymouth, meaning seven games are remaining on the punishment.

Noesen, who has 17 goals and nine assists in 26 games for Plymouth, was considered one of the most dangerous scorers in the American lineup. The Senators were also anxious to see what Noesen, selected in the first round (21st overall) of the 2011, could do against elite international competition.

"We are disappointed for Stefan that the suspension won't allow him the opportunity to play in the tournament, but also respect the decisions made by the OHL and IIHF," Senators general manager Bryan Murray explained in a statement.

USA Hockey executive director Dave Ogrean was left frustrated with the ruling.

"While we respect the IIHF's decision, we don't feel the process is equitable," he said, in a statement. "Moving forward, we'll work with the IIHF and other federations to address the situation."

With Noesen not playing in Russia, the lone Senators prospect is Swedish defenceman Mikael Wikstrand. Wikstrand, a Swede, has nine goals and nine assists in 29 games with Mora this season.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.18.2012

646626 Ottawa Senators

Mendes: Charities need an NHL truce

Players should be able to attend team charity events

By Ian Mendes, Ottawa Citizen December 17, 2012

In December of 2005, I took our oldest daughter for a routine appointment at CHEO.

As we walked out of the hospital, we happened to run into three familiar faces: Senators defencemen Zdeno Chara and Wade Redden and club president Roy Mlakar.

I was surprised to see them, because the team was on a road trip and playing a game in Florida that night. Mlakar explained to me that the club had received an urgent phone call from CHEO that morning. A patient with a terminal illness had wished to meet a couple of members of the Ottawa Senators and the hospital was hastily trying to arrange a visit.

As luck would have it, there were a couple of players in town who were not travelling with the team. Chara happened to be serving a one-game suspension for his role in a memorable brawl with the Los Angeles Kings a couple of nights earlier. Redden, meanwhile, was recovering from a shoulder injury.

The club approached the two players about making this special hospital visit on their own time. There would be no cameras or press coverage of this visit; just a couple of NHL stars taking a quiet moment to spend with a tiny fan.

With nothing else on their schedules, the players graciously accepted the request from management.

Fast-forward to today and a precious moment like that could not unfold. Thanks to the current NHL lockout, players are forbidden to have any contact with management. And while that rule certainly has merit in regards to the CBA negotiations, it is also puzzling as to why it has to also extend into the charitable arms of an organization.

On Friday, the Senators made their annual team visit to CHEO. Prior to the event starting, the hospital staff had to remind the children in the room that their favourite NHL stars would not be attending. There was just something wrong about a child in a wheelchair being told that Daniel Alfredsson and Chris Phillips would not be coming to see them this year because of a prolonged labour dispute.

Now, it should be noted that even without the NHL players, the event was heartwarming, as Paul MacLean led a group of coaches and alumni who handed out gifts to the patients. And yes, those kids were absolutely thrilled to pose for pictures with Spartacat as well. But it was undeniable that

something was missing on Friday, because NHL players are always the star attraction.

To make up for this short-sighted policy, Phillips has organized a group of current players who will visit CHEO Tuesday afternoon. This second hospital visit had to be arranged because, under the current lockout rules, players cannot attend the same charitable event as the team mascot.

And it certainly doesn't have to be this way.

On multiple occasions during this lockout, the NHL has lifted its self-imposed ban to allow contact between management and the players. In October, there was a 48-hour window where a general manager had the permission to speak to any of his players. And then two weeks ago, the league famously agreed to allow owners and players in the same room for a round of CBA negotiations. In fact, the rules were so relaxed during this period that Sidney Crosby was reported to have flown into New York on the same private jet as Penguins owners Ron Burkle and Mario Lemieux.

So using this as a precedent, it would not be a stretch for the NHL to make an exception for players to be involved with club-sponsored charities during the lockout. If they were truly worried about optics, the league could easily make stipulations that forbid players from appearing at the same event as their general manager or owner. But just because the players are locked out in a debate over salary limits doesn't mean they should be shut out from making a difference in the communities in which they play.

Remember, any proceeds the players generate through charities do not go into the hockey-related revenue pot that the two sides are fighting over. And right now, local charities are losing out because there are no 50/50 draws at NHL games, no abundance of signed merchandise to auction off and, most notably, no players to attend the team-sponsored events.

The NHL is currently losing a major public relations battle and will have an uphill climb to regain the trust of fans once this lockout ends. The common fan already thinks they are too greedy, but by actively hurting charities across the continent, the NHL comes off as cold, indifferent and insensitive. If the league was smart, it would allow the players — who they will shamelessly promote when the game returns — to remain in the public eye through charitable endeavours with their respective teams.

If there is some good that can be done in NHL communities through player involvement with team charities, then common sense should prevail over the spiteful restrictions that are currently in place. But as we've seen too many times with this NHL lockout, common sense never seems to enter the equation.

Ian Mendes covers a variety of topics — including the Ottawa Senators — for Rogers Sportsnet. He is also co-author of The Best Seat In The House with Jamie McLennan. Follow Ian at Twitter.com/ian_mendes.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.18.2012

646627 Ottawa Senators

Senators prospect Stefan Noesen to miss world junior hockey championships

By Tim Baines ,Ottawa Sun

Already whacked with a 10-game suspension from the OHL, Stefan Noesen is paying a much stiffer price.

The Senators prospect found out Monday that he is ineligible to play for the U.S. at the world junior hockey championship, which begins next Wednesday in Ufa, Russia.

Noesen, who plays for the Plymouth Whalers, is serving a suspension for a hit on Oshawa Generals' Tyler Hore Dec. 8. The IIHF recognizes suspensions from certified leagues in member federations and was left with little choice but to take action, with seven games remaining in Noesen's penalty.

It's a blow to Noesen, to the U.S. team and to the Senators, who would certainly see benefit to their prospect's participation in the world juniors.

"We lose a good player, a good solid player," U.S. GM Jim Johannson told NHL.com. "He was one of those guys looking forward to playing in his first championship. Here's a guy who was never suspended in two previous

seasons in the OHL and, then, one forecheck play ends up determining his fate this year. I think that's hard for everybody involved in the decision. In the end, we'll have to work on the process as administrators."

Noesen could have helped the Americans. The native of Plano, Texas has 26 points in 26 games for the Whalers.

"While we respect the IIHF's decision, we don't feel the process is equitable," said Dave Ogrean, executive director of USA Hockey. "Moving forward, we'll work with the IIHF and other federations to address the situation."

Noesen, taken 21st overall by the Senators in the 2011 draft, was expected to be a key contributor for the U.S.

Noesen (@ScubaShteve93), who couldn't be reached for comment, tweeted: "Boy, does it feel nice to walk outside in 65-degree weather and sunny. Much rather be in an ice rink right now tho. #itiswhatitis."

In a statement, Senators GM Bryan Murray said, "We are disappointed for Stefan that the suspension won't allow him the opportunity to play in the tournament, but also respect the decisions made by the OHL and IIHF."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.18.2012 646628 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins players not talking about NHLPA vote

By Rob Rossi

NHL players are voting on the future of their union.

Presumably.

More than 700 members of the Players' Association have through Thursday to vote on authorizing the executive board to "disclaim interest," a legal maneuver that will immediately disband the union. Two-thirds of the players must vote in favor of authorizing the executive board to disclaim interest for it to pass.

Penguins veterans Craig Adams, Matt Cooke, Brooks Orpik and Sidney Crosby each declined comment on the vote Monday after a players' organized practice at Southpointe.

Those players also declined to discuss details of legal action taken by the NHL last Friday, when the league filed a class-action complaint in New York federal court and an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

Adams was named by the league in the complaint.

"I'm aware I'm in it," he said, declining additional comment.

NHLPA officials have not said if the union would "disclaim interest," a move that would end collective bargaining because players would not be represented as a whole by executive director Donald Fehr or his staff.

NFL and NBA players voted to decertify during labor disputes with those leagues during 2011 lockouts. The NFLPA and NBPA each re-certified when new labor contracts were agreed upon in the NFL and NBA. NFL players were decertified for four months. NBA players struck a deal with the league within days of decertification.

An NHL owners' lockout of players reached Day 93 on Monday. No bargaining sessions are scheduled, deputy commissioner Bill Daly said.

The sides last bargained Dec. 4-5 in New York. Over the past month, federal mediators have twice failed to bridge gaps between the sides.

Games are canceled through Dec. 30, though another round of cancelations is expected by the weekend. The NHL has canceled at least two week's worth of games when announcing schedule adjustments.

Another two-week cancelation would wipe out games through Jan. 14. The shortened 1995 season began Jan. 20 of that year. The 2004-05 season was canceled Feb. 16, 2005.

Players were to receive a fifth pay check Saturday. Their next check is scheduled for Dec. 31.

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Tribune Review LOADED: 12.18.2012

646629 Pittsburgh Penguins

Crosby hits the dek

By Seth Rorabaugh / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For Sidney Crosby, a by-product of the NHL's lockout is an inordinate amount of free time.

Construction of a new house in Sewickley has occupied a portion of that time as well as other activities, such as attending concerts at Consol Energy Center.

Dek hockey can be added to that list of time-fillers as well.

Stories surfaced on Twitter and Facebook late Friday and early Saturday that Crosby participated in a dek hockey game Friday at Dek Star, a rink in Ohio Township next to Interstate 279. Photos on Twitter showed Crosby dressed in goaltender gear. After an informal practice Monday at Southpointe, Crosby confirmed he moonlighted between the pipes.

"My buddy plays in the league there. I talked to him about playing," Crosby said. "I played a lot of goalie in street hockey growing up and stuff. Just asked if he needed a goalie. He said sure and I came out. It was cool."

Due to his equipment, the presence of hockey's most recognizable figure was not known by those at the rink until late in the contest.

"I had all the [goaltending] gear on," Crosby said. "I was talking to the ref once toward the end of the game and I think he recognized me."

"My referee walked over just to kind of say, 'Hey, you're not the normal goalie. It's about time they get a goalie.' " said Chris Evans, general manager of Dek Star. "Instead, he looked at him and he was like, 'Holy [cow] that's Sidney Crosby.' "

"The other team played against him for an hour and had no idea. They didn't even know until I told them until after he left."

Crosby, who has been limited to 22 games last season due to injuries, expressed no concern at the prospect of suffering any additional ailments.

"It's a hockey ball and I have ice hockey gear on. I'm not too worried about it," he said. "I guess there's always a chance. I wouldn't take that risk if I thought it was a big one."

Crosby, who regularly plays goaltender in street hockey (or road hockey as it's called in Canada) games in the offseason, earned a shutout, 4-0, Friday in his one and only game. Ever the team player, he credited his teammates with his success.

"I didn't have one shot. My team was really good defensively."

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.18.2012 646630 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins' Craig Adams gets caught in lockout's legal moves

By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Four days ago, Craig Adams finally got something other than headaches and ulcers for serving as the Penguins player representative.

He got named in a lawsuit the NHL filed in federal court in Manhattan.

Adams' offense?

Being a member of the NHL Players' Association's 30-member negotiating committee, a group that has been trying for months, with no success, to work out a collective bargaining agreement with the league.

NHL officials decided to go to court to reaffirm the legality of the lockout that has shut down the league since Sept. 16, and Adams ended up being part of the paperwork.

So did the other 29 members of the negotiating committee, along with a half-dozen players who represent various classifications of players, from unsigned draft choices to unrestricted free agents.

"At first, I was [surprised to be named]," Adams said after a playerorganized workout Monday at Southpointe. "Then I realized why the guys were named. I'm not worried about it."

Especially when there are more pressing concerns.

Like what impact the league's lawsuit, along with an unfair labor practice complaint it filed with the National Labor Relations Board the same day, will have on the chances of negotiating a new CBA.

And how 700-plus eligible NHLPA members will vote on the issue of whether to give the union's executive board clearance to submit a disclaimer of interest -- essentially, to proclaim its intention to cease representing its members -- if it determines that would be prudent.

Adams said he regards the league's moves, along with the ongoing NHLPA voting, as "major" developments in the lockout "in the sense that they're not decisions that are taken lightly"

Although the NHLPA is widely expected to give the executive board authority to file a disclaimer of interest -- the balloting won't end until Thursday -- Adams declined to predict how the vote will turn out.

"I'm not going to speculate on it," he said. "Everybody's free to vote the way they want to."

Negotiations are allowed to proceed, despite the NHL's legal action and labor complaint, although neither side seems particularly interested in talking at this point.

The parties apparently have not spoken since late last week, and there's no indication they plan to do so anytime soon.

Adams' exasperation with the inability to forge a new CBA has been evident in his expression at times in the past few months, although he insists, "there have been lots of times as a player when I've been just as frustrated."

Adams is, on many levels, a natural for the role he's filling these days. He's Harvard educated, analytical and well-spoken.

And, perhaps most important, seems genuinely interested in the interests of other NHLPA members.

"Part of it's that you feel a little bit of responsibility," he said. "Somebody has to do it -- or, some people have to -- and a lot of guys have, so it's been great.

"[The desire is] to help out any way you can, whether it's passing information along to other guys or trying to be there with our [NHLPA] staff, trying to make decisions and things like that."

That has meant more than a few out-of-town trips on short notice, sacrificing time with his family -- and, occasionally, workouts that prepare him in case there actually is hockey this winter -- so he could be involved in the negotiations.

"I've probably regretted it a few times when I've gone to New York and Toronto and not a lot has happened, and [had] some missed time with the family and things like that," he said.

Adams was in New Jersey last week for a second round of unproductive federal mediation, but says the futility of the trips he has made so far won't dissuade him from doing it again.

"We've all invested too much in the process to give up on it now," he said.
"We're committed to finding a solution and, hopefully, we're going to find one soon.

"Or it's going to be a long time until we play hockey again."

NOTES -- A player-organized workout today at Southpointe figures to attract the most participants of any in the near future. A number of players, including Sidney Crosby, are expected to depart in the next few days to spend the holidays elsewhere. ... Winger James Neal will play in a charity game Wednesday night in Toronto.

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.18.2012

646631 San Jose Sharks

San Francisco Bulls play at San Jose Sharks' home

By David Pollak

SAN JOSE -- The downtown restaurants were happy for Monday night's bump in business as hockey -- albeit the minor league variety -- returned to HP Pavilion for the first time since April.

But not all the 12,881 fans who showed up to see the San Francisco Bulls fall 6-4 to the Stockton Thunder were all smiles, willing to put the nastiness of the NHL lockout, now in its 95th day, behind them.

Yes, some were pleased with the Sharks' attempt to soothe a weary fan base. And some were desperate enough to see pro hockey that they opened their wallets in the resale market when they came up empty-handed after the free tickets were distributed.

"I bought them on Craigslist," said Jamen Barreras, who added that he normally attends 10 to 15 Sharks games each season. "I paid \$45 each for me and my brother."

Barreras, who drove from Antioch, then stopped at the Los Gatos Brewing Company before heading for the arena, acknowledged he needed his hockey fix.

But another fan said she was going to the game almost reluctantly.

Jan Olsen, a 56-year-old Los Gatos resident who shares season tickets with her brother, initially planned to stay home. At one point, she said she was going to take the Sharks up on their ticket offer but leave the seat empty in protest.

"Then I realized my community is there. I want to go and see the people that we sit with and don't get to see," she said. "That's why I'm going, not to support the Sharks. Because

I don't support the Sharks."

Olsen and her brother, Larry Blair of San Mateo, are divided over whether to renew their season tickets. Olsen said the lockout has helped her discover that her life doesn't need to be tied to the NHL schedule and wants to give them up.

"I wish they would just call off this season and give me back my money," she said. "There's so many things to do, and I don't have to worry about missing a hockey game."

Olsen and Blair had their pregame meal at the Brittania Arms, a pub that includes former Sharks captain Owen Nolan as an owner.

Sonny Walters, general manager there, said the Brit, too, was losing significant business because of the lockout. A typical game night would bring in about 800 to 900 people, he said. Without hockey, that number is around 250.

Inside the arena, fans filled about two-thirds of the seats and saved some of their loudest cheers for Sharks forward Ryane Clowe, who is practicing with the Bulls and serving as an assistant coach on game nights.

Clowe said before the game that he didn't expect any fans to take out their lockout unhappiness on him -- "I play the game hard, and they've always treated me great" -- and that proved to be the case.

The crowd focused more on the fight-filled game than the brawl at the bargaining table, though one fan changed his "This is Sharks Territory" sign to read "This is Lockout Territory."

The fans who showed up didn't match the full house that usually fills HP Pavilion, but they did follow the Sharks' suggestion to stop at downtown restaurants before and after the game. Those restaurants closest to the arena have lost about 30 percent of their business, according to Scott Knies, executive director of the San Jose Downtown Association.

At Henry's Hi-Life, every table was filled, and dozens of other fans were crammed into the bar area 90 minutes before the opening faceoff.

"I really appreciate what they did, bringing the Bulls down here," said Richard Aradna, owner of the legendary barbecue joint less than a quarter mile from HP Pavilion. "This is what a Shark night is like. I'm excited, the staff is excited -- this is what we're looking forward to with the lockout ending. But there's no end in sight."

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 12.18.2012

646632 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning coaches, staff bond during NHL lockout

By Damian Cristodero, Times Staff Writer

Normally, it is not appropriate for Lightning employees to mock coach Guy Boucher with what assistant equipment manager Rob Kennedy laughingly called "a few sweet nothings."

But this was a competition, and Boucher and team massage therapist Christian Rivas were thumping all comers in what had turned into a five-hour marathon of Washers, a game best described as a combination of horseshoes and Cornhole.

"Nothing derogatory, nothing to get you in trouble," Kennedy said of the taunts aimed at Boucher, "just a little something to get him off his game."

"At one point," video coach Nigel Kirwan added, "somebody even said to him, 'You're not our boss out here.' "

"Out here" was at Fort De Soto Park where on Wednesday and Thursday Boucher, Kirwan and assistant coaches Dan Lacroix and Marty Raymond joined five members of the team's training and equipment staffs on a two-night camping trip that was both bonding exercise and morale booster.

The group has organized weekly gatherings during the NHL lockout to maintain the personal relationships they believe essential to the efficient workings of what Kennedy called their "team within a team." That efficiency will be tested if the lockout ends in the next month or so and a compressed 48-game schedule turns a usually hectic pace manic.

So, "we have to stay connected," Raymond said. "We have to build relationships."

Golf is the default activity, but simply shooting the breeze at the Tampa Bay Times Forum works too. The idea of a camping trip had percolated for a while.

"When you're camping there's teamwork involved as far as getting meals made, getting the bedding, tents," Kennedy said. "It's similar to a road trip."

The group took over two water-side campsites at Fort De Soto and marked them with a large blue Lightning banner.

Bold, food-stealing raccoons were a problem, and high winds made fishing miserable. But talk around the campfire was jovial and food was plentiful.

And then there was Boucher, who apparently took Washers as seriously as he did the Eastern Conference final.

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The campsite was fairly secluded with three tents and Kennedy's pop-up camper. Kennedy, an Eagle Scout growing up in Chicago, arrived Tuesday with Kirwan to set things up and create what Kennedy called a "campy feel."

Equipment manager Ray Thill showed up Wednesday in his 22-foot boat he guided across the bay from Tampa. The vessel was beached for a while when the tide went out, which delayed some fishing plans. But Thill said his first cross-bay trip was "really cool, something I really wanted to do."

They ate grilled burgers Wednesday night; eggs, sausage and bacon Thursday morning; steaks and chops Thursday night with Boucher footing what was about a \$400 food bill.

They threw around a football and fished, unsuccessfully, off Thill's boat and on the flats.

"It was just a bunch of guys hanging around a campfire, sharing stories and laughs," Kirwan said. "We laughed our butts off the whole time."

Especially at the raccoons which Thill called "nosy little buggers" that "got into everything."

One, ignoring Kirwan and assistant athletic trainer Mike Poirier just inches away, jumped on a chair and stole a bag of marshmallows that were supposed to be for S'mores.

Another snuck into Raymond's empty tent and stole a bag of croissants meant for Thursday breakfast.

"I start yelling, 'The raccoon stole something out of the tent,' " Kirwan said. "So we chased after him, but we couldn't catch him in the woods."

Probably for the best given how nasty raccoons can be, though the halfeaten bag of croissants was recovered.

"The raccoons had a lot of fun; good for them," Raymond said, laughing. "At least it wasn't just us having fun."

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Because he does not golf, Boucher only intermittently is part of the group's weekly gatherings, so getting him to Fort De Soto seemed special.

What also was cool, Kirwan said, was how among everyone "the titles melted away."

That was clear during the Washers tournament as Boucher and Rivas won their first 10 games. That made them targets, especially Boucher whom Kirwan said "is just as competitive (at Washers) as anything else. He did not like losing."

"We were all giving it to him," Kirwan added. "The jokes were flying every which way. It wasn't a situation where people were on guard about what they said to each other. He dished it and took it and he was a man about it. It was really good."

There was no corroboration from Boucher, who left Friday to visit a friend in Vienna. But before the outing he praised the lengths to which his staff has gone to stay bonded during the lockout, which is in its 94th day.

"The only thing we can do is control what we can control," he said, "and that's the staff working to make sure we're tight and we're a family-type atmosphere."

"Hopefully this makes us stronger as a staff," Raymond added, "and that will help us down the road."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.18.2012

646633 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: What you need to know

Bob Mitchell

With the NHLPA's disclaimer vote underway, hockey fans really have only one question.

Will there be a season?

Unfortunately, we don't know. But there are potentially some darker days ahead. Many fans are as much confused as angry. With all that in mind, we provide Lockout 101, an update to everything regarding the lockout:

GAMES CANCELLED

Players have missed six of 13 paycheques with 526 games cancelled through Dec. 30. The league previously cancelled the outdoor New Year's Day Winter Classic between the Leafs and Red Wings in Ann Arbor, Mich. Also gone is the 2012-13 All-Star Game on Jan. 27 in Columbus.

STATE OF TALKS

Neither side is meeting. The NHL and NHLPA met with federal mediators in New York, Dec. 12-13, but then talks ended.

HAPPENING NOW

All 750 players are deciding whether to give their 30-member executive board the mandate to file what is known as a "disclaimer of interest." A two-thirds majority is needed to take the next step — dissolving their union. The

five-day informal electronic vote is being conducted until Thursday. Afterwards, the board has until Jan. 2 to actually file the disclaimer in court.

WILL IT PASS?

Think "solidarity" here. There's no way players won't get behind this move. Not giving their board this power basically ends the game, with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman smiling like the Cheshire Cat. So it has to play out even if the decertification is a bluff.

THEN WHAT HAPPENS

If players decide to file the disclaimer, it paves the way for them to decertify their union, a far more complicated and lengthier process that could lead to filing an anti-trust lawsuit against the league challenging the legality of the lockout.

Unlike deciding the disclaimer route, decertification requires a formal vote of all players and that vote must then be approved by the U.S. National Labor Relations Board.

As long as the union exists, the NHL is protected from anti-trust legislation and is allowed to impose restrictions such as free agency and salary caps under the collective bargaining agreement with its players. But if the union no longer exists, then a court could decide the league's lockout — and the way it operates — violates anti-trust laws. A successful lawsuit could result in players being awarded triple their lost salary in damages.

Such threats in the past have led to settlements involving locked out NBA and NFL players. The NBA settled two weeks after its players filed its disclaimer in court. Laws in the U.S. prevent non-unionized workers from being locked out by their employer, so players hope the threat will entice the league back to the bargaining table.

TIMETABLE PROBLEMS

It can take 45 days for decertification. Bettman said the league won't play less than 48 games, the same number played in 1994-95 when a lockout ended on Jan. 11.

So if the players actually go that route, the season likely will be over. Of course, the players hope the threat of decertification — and the NHL potentially losing a huge lawsuit — will bring both sides back to the table for a quick settlement.

Both sides could still resume negotiating even if players are in favour of going ahead with decertification. After the NBA and NBA locked out its players, their unions went the same disclaimer route, before a new collective agreement was reached. In 2004-05, the NHL became the first major sports league in North America to cancel an entire season because when the door closed on Feb. 16.

For a 48-game schedule to make sense, games need to start being played by the middle of January. Teams would likely need a two-week training camp before games counted.

NHL LAWSUIT

Last Friday, the league launched a pre-emptive strike by filing a classaction lawsuit in a New York federal court essentially asking the courts to rule their lockout legal. In their 43-page action, the NHL argued the NHLPA was using its "disclaimer of interest" as a bargaining ploy to get a more favourable agreement.

The league also filed an unfair labour practice complaint with the NLRB, alleging the threat of heading down the disclaimer path means the NHLPA has engaged in bad-faith bargaining under the collective bargaining process.

NHL HAMMER

In the 43-page lawsuit, the NHL said if the NHLPA ceases to exist, then so do all contracts that were negotiated under the collective bargaining agreement.

INTERESTING FUTURE DATE

Under their new 10-year contract, NBC's slate of weekend games is scheduled to begin Jan. 20.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.18.2012

646634 Toronto Maple Leafs

Plenty of Maple Leafs to be at NHLPA charity game

By Lance Hornby ,Toronto Sun

TORONTO - The Maple Leafs will have quite a presence on Wednesday night when the Players Association and RBC stage a charity game for locked-out members and hockey-starved fans at the revamped Gardens.

Ten Leafs are on the tentative roster, as well as six former members of the blue and white, as well as many rank and file from the Greater Toronto Area. Steven Stamkos of the Tampa Bay Lightning and P.K. Subban of the Montreal Canadiens will be the honourary captains of two teams, which will play a 5-on-5, 60-minute game at the 2,600-seat Mattamy Athletic Centre at Ryerson University.

The 2,600 \$25 tickets — proceeds of which go to the NHLPA's Goals and Dreams Fund and the bank's grassroots' hockey initiatives — sold out in about an hour last week, despite fan anger and apathy at the 93-day lockout

The Leafs on the roster, which was released Monday morning, include captain Dion Phaneuf and fellow defencemen John-Michael Liles and Mike Komisarek. The forwards are Phil Kessel, Joffrey Lupul, Tim Connolly, Matthew Lombardi, Clarke MacArthur, David Steckel and Jay McClement.

Ex-Leafs are goaltender Jonas Gustavsson, defencemen Carlo Colaiacovo, Tomas Kaberle and forwards Kris Versteeg and John Mitchell and former first rounder Brad Boyes.

Scoring ace Stamkos and Habs' defenceman Subban will be joined by James Neal, Michael Del Zotto, Chris Campoli, Niklas Kronwall, Kyle Quincey, Dan Cleary, David Clarkson, B.J. Crombeen, Steve Downie, Logan Couture, Chris Kelly, Tom Kostopoulos, Matt Martin, Teddy Purcell, Steve Ott, Peter Regin, Wojtek Wolski and Dan Winnik. Joining Gustavsson in goal are Michael Leighton and Martin Biron.

On the lockout front, the players are voting electronically the next few days on whether to give their executive a mandate to file a disclaimer of interest in U.S. courts, a bold move to try and force the owners into more concessions under the threat of anti-trust suits in the new year.

Despite the rhetoric and a pre-emptive courtroom strike by the league on Friday that accuses the union of bad-faith bargaining, the sides are not as far apart as people think. A shortened schedule is still a possibility if both sides come back to the table by Christmas.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.18.2012 646635 Toronto Maple Leafs

Joffrey Lupul not denied access over lockout: Real Sports

By Lance Hornby ,Toronto Sun

TORONTO - The Maple Leafs did not intend to make Joffrey Lupul go hungry because of the lockout.

Lupul took to Twitter on Sunday to express his surprise that the 93-day labour dispute had become so intense that his reservation request at the team-themed Real Sports Bar and Grill was turned down because he's a player. Another report said new teammate James van Riemsdyk tweeted a similar experience a few weeks ago at the popular eatery next to the Air Canada Centre.

Tom Anselmi, president and COO of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, says it was a mix-up.

"Not our policy at all," Anselmi said in an e-mail to QMI. "The place was booked solid, the only reason Joffrey didn't get a reservation."

As part of his original commentary on the @JLupul account, Lupul questioned why he'd be turned away by a restaurant whose adjoining business still profits from selling Leaf jerseys "at \$300 a pop".

Lupul later deleted that tweet and added a new message. "In hindsight Twitter was probably not the right place to voice my displeasure with @realsports. That's not why I use twitter. Was just rattled."

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.18.2012 646636 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs forward Joffrey Lupul on the NHL lockout and his restaurant problems

By Sean Fitz-Gerald

Locked out Toronto Maple Leafs forward Joffrey Lupul covered a lot of territory during a 10-minute appearance on Sportsnet 590 The FAN Monday morning — from why he will not be returning to play in Russia to the NHLPA membership's position on leader Donald Fehr to his frustrations at not being able to make a reservation at a team-owned restaurant during the NHL's lockout.

Lupul, who spent a little more than a month with the bottom-dwelling Avtomobilist, has returned to Toronto, where he will participate in the RBC Play Hockey Charity Challenge on Wednesday. On Sunday, he turned heads by tweeting Real Sports, the popular sports bar owned by Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment, was not accepting reservations from Leafs players — its locked-out employees.

Here is a partial transcript of what Lupul told The FAN on Monday:

On the tweet:

"Honestly, I wish I didn't write that. I don't do stuff like that on Twitter, but I was just frustrated and just wrote that. And obviously, with Twitter, you can't really take it back. So I felt bad."

After one of the hosts suggested he could simply claim his account was hacked:

"Oh yeah. It was." [laughs]

On whether the NHLPA's vote to disclaim interest might hasten hockey's return:

"Well, right now, we're voting on that, and we've got to see which way things are going to go. I think everyone — myself included — was very hopeful and confident that the deal was going to get done in this past week, without having to go down this road. But now, it just seems that we've reached a standstill, both sides. And some other action is going to need to be taken. First things first, we'll see what happens in this vote, and see what everyone's thinking. I know we've had several conference calls, and everyone's been briefed on exactly what different things mean, whether it's decertifying or disclaimer of interest. Right now, there's really not too much I can say."

On the sense of union solidarity in those calls:

"It's strong. We went this far. Obviously, there's going to be some guys with different opinions, but I mean, at the end of the day, we hired Don Fehr to do a job, and we trusted him then. We have to trust him now. I think, just judging by guys on the call ... there's some guys with different suggestions and different opinions, but for the most part, everyone completely trusts Don and is happy with the job he's doing. Obviously, we're all very frustrated we're not playing hockey by now. I don't think anyone saw this happening at the start. But I think now, more than ever, is the time you've got to stick together, because the owners have shown they're definitely looking to find some cracks in the PA. And doing things like trying to negotiate without Don there and stuff like that just shows they would be a little more happy if he wasn't in the room."

On his brief experience playing in the KHL:

"It was interesting. I mean, I went over there; I wanted to play somewhere. That opportunity came. I went. It was probably a little more difficult than I thought, with just the language barrier and living in a new country. It was a little more than I bargained for, probably. And at the end of the day, my heart's here. I want to play here. I want the season to start back up here."

On one eye-opener of living in Russia:

"It was the first day I was there: Walking down the street, and on the sidewalk there was a manhole with no cover on it. I was walking with a guy

on the team, and I was just in disbelief that this could happen. I was like, 'someone's going to fall in here.' And he was like, 'yeah, for sure someone will.' But, I was like, 'they'll sue someone.' And he's like, 'uh, you don't really sue people in Russia.""

On whether he will return to Russia after the holiday break:

"No, I won't be going back. I thought about it a little bit. I felt bad leaving the team, but like I said, my heart's here. And I was having a little difficulty living there, with the language barrier and everything. I'm here for the foreseeable future."

On playing in a charity game at Maple Leaf Gardens — now known as Ryerson University's Mattamy Athletic Centre — with NHLers such as P.K. Subban and Steven Stamkos on Wednesday night:

"I've never played there, or even been there, so I'm looking forward to it a lot. I know, just skating with some of the guys here, everyone's really excited about this, and it's obviously for a good cause. I know a lot of guys are back in this area for the holidays, so it should just be a fun event. And it just shows how much everybody cares about hockey and misses hockey, the fact that it sold out in, I think, less than a day."

National Post LOADED: 12.18.2012

646637 Vancouver Canucks

Edler's back, but may never be 100 per cent

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun December 17, 2012

There is a difference between feeling 100 per cent and playing 100 per cent. Alex Edler can live with discomfort – and probably will have to – as long as he can play at full throttle in the National Hockey League.

During the lockout, he has pains but no games. But Edler is well enough to be declared fit by the Vancouver Canucks after the defenceman spent three months re-rehabilitating a back injury caused by a bulging disc.

For now, this means two things: Edler no longer gets paid during the owners' lockout, and he can show solidarity with his union brothers by wearing a NHL Players' Association practice jersey instead of a Canuck sweater during ice sessions.

"You know what?" Edler said Monday when asked about coming off the dole. "I would much, much rather be healthy and not getting paid. That's the most important. It's absolutely terrible to not be able to be out there with the guys because I'm hurt. I would give back all my paycheques if I could have been 100 per cent healthy."

That's a lot of money.

As an injured player, Edler received \$1.16 million US of his \$3.25-million annual salary. Fellow defenceman Jason Garrison, also medically cleared after nursing a groin injury through the fall, was paid about a third of his \$2.5 million 2012-13 salary, which followed a \$3 million signing bonus.

Ryan Kesler, whose recovery from off-season wrist and shoulder surgeries is months behind schedule, is the only Canuck still getting paid. The centre's salary is \$5 million.

Edler, who skated with a handful of other unpaid teammates Monday at the University of B.C., is relieved to be healthy. And the Canucks will be relieved to be off the hook financially in a season when revenue has been all but shut off by the dumbest lockout in sports history.

But the 26-year-old's improved health short-term does not erase concerns about his long-term viability as a No. 1 defenceman relied upon to play 24 minutes a game, 100 nights a year.

Edler's durability will be an issue – season or not – when he becomes an unrestricted free agent in July.

Edler required back surgery two years ago and missed the final 2 ½ months of the regular season. His back problems resurfaced at the end of this summer when Edler ramped up the intensity of his training.

Still, before the Collective Bargaining Agreement's expiration on Sept. 15 triggered the start of the lockout, the Canucks made a long-term contract offer that would have boosted Edler's average salary to the level of the

team's highest-paid defencemen. Garrison and Canuck Kevin Bieksa have cap hits of \$4.6-million.

Edler and Point Roberts-based agent Mark Stowe took a mighty risk turning it down, since the next CBA will likely contain contract restrictions that did not previously exist, as well as a significantly lower salary cap.

Edler admitted Monday that he may never feel "100 per cent," that his back may always be sore.

"Any injury you have that's coming back, you get a little extra cautious," Edler said. "But we've got great doctors here and we've been talking a lot. Obviously, it's been very frustrating. But you've got to trust the doctors that it's going to heal, probably not to 100 per cent. But I wasn't 100 per cent last year, either, and I played all 82 games."

Edler had a career season, leading Canuck defenceman with 49 points, including 11 goals. But he played poorly in a first-round playoff loss to the Los Angeles Kings, then lost steady blueline partner Sami Salo to free agency on Canada Day when the veteran signed a two-year, \$7.5-million deal with the Tampa Bay Lightning.

To replace Salo, the Canucks lured Garrison from the Florida Panthers with an offer of six years and \$27.6-million. At least Edler and Garrison have had time in the training room to get acquainted while teammates skated mostly without them. The injured players were allowed to participate only in practices involving the UBC Thunderbirds.

"The lockout has been a little different for me," Edler said. "It's been kind of weird. I've been having rehab, so at least I had a goal to get better. It must be harder for the guys that don't really know what they're practising for. I certainly missed them a lot of times."

Edler has been skating for about a month.

Canuck assistant general manager Laurence Gilman said there is always some concern with back injuries, but isn't worried about Edler's assertion that he may never feel 100 per cent healthy.

"I think that's accepting the fact that there may always be a level of discomfort," Gilman said. "That's no different than a lot of players. Hockey is a physical game every game. At some point, we're going to play again and we'll see how Alex performs. We would not clear him (medically) if we didn't strongly believe he's ready to play."

Gilman and Edler agreed gauging his recovery is difficult without the benefit of games or even full practices run by NHL coaches.

"I would never play worrying that I was going to hurt myself," Edler said. "That's not going to work. When I play, I'm going to play 100 per cent. I'm not going to think about getting hurt. I would love to play. We all want to play."

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 12.18.2012

646638 Vancouver Canucks

Pushing each other to edge of cliff may kick-start NHL lockout talks

By Ben Kuzma

VANCOUVER — At one point Monday, a frustrated Manny Malhotra smashed his stick on the boards and bolted from the UBC ice surface. The Vancouver Canucks centre returned with a new blade and you had to wonder whether it was the stick or an NHL lockout solution stuck in neutral that had him riled up.

"There was a rattle in it — bad stick," said Malhotra.

That solved one mini-mystery but the bigger one is what level of sabre-rattling between NHL owners and the players union will it take to reach a new collective bargaining agreement? The league got an elbow up Friday by filing a class-action complaint in New York asking the state court to declare the lockout legal and named 36 players as defendants. It also filed an unfair labour practice charge against the NHL Players' Association with the National Labor Relations Board, arguing that the players' union hasn't bargained in good faith. It was a calculated move in case the players disbanded and asked the court to end the lockout.

In response, players began voting electronically Sunday over a five-day period to file a disclaimer of interest. If two-thirds of the membership approves — the players will because it's a show of solidarity — then the NHLPA executive board has the authority to dissolve the union. That would allow individual players to file anti-trust suits and be paid triple their lost salaries in damages if successful in a court proceeding. Then again, both sides seem to be pushing each other to the edge of the impasse cliff. The NHLPA has until Jan. 2 to file the disclaimer. After that, it can be filed again but another vote would have to be taken.

In the stand-off, the league could also cancel another week of games in January to coincide with the Jan. 2 filing. Or the two sides could eventually talk again and try to salvage a 48-game season starting Jan. 15. When NBA players disclaimed interest in Nov. 14, 2011 and then filed an anti-trust suit, there was a new CBA in place in just a dozen days.

"We're just going down this road to see if it will bring on some change and allow us to go forward," said Malhotra, who takes an active role in the 31-player negotiating committee. "It's not about poking (the owners), it's the next step in the process. As players, we have the right to see if the union serves our best interests and we find ourselves at a stalemate."

Some movement on either side could get the game back on the ice in a hurry. While the league is seeking a 10-year CBA term with an opt out after eight and players want eight years with an opt out after six, it doesn't seem like too big a bridge to gap. The league wants a five-year limit on contract length and the union has proposed eight and that's where it starts to bog down. The owners also want a five per cent variance on contract payments terms while players want 25 per cent, so the angst on part of the players is understandable. After getting 57 per cent of revenue in the expired CBA, a sliding scale over four years would take them to the 50-50 split that owners have demanded. So filing a disclaimer of interest isn't shocking and maybe it will provide the right kind settlement shock.

"I feel like we've exhausted all of our options right now," said Canucks defenceman Kevin Bieksa. "It's an appropriate thing to do because we've been backed into corner. It's another step in the process and we'll see how it goes. We still have a good week ahead of us before the holidays. I'm sure things will quiet down during the holiday break for four or five days, so there is still time for something to happen."

Perhaps in time for the NHL to return by Jan. 15?

"You can throw dates around and they keep passing us," said Bieksa. "I'm not going to look too far forward."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.18.2012

646639 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks D-man Alex Edler declared fit to play

By Ben Kuzma, The Province December 17, 2012

With Alex Edler, it's never been so much about what he says. It's how he plays.

The Vancouver Canucks defenceman isn't as comfortable with the media as he is on the ice, but his level of comfort in recovering from a bulging disc is now the prime focus after being medically cleared. It means the towering Swede has traded those cheques while under the care of the NHL team for the checks he hopes to absorb and deliver with that bothersome back, should the season be salvaged.

"I've been skating five times a week for over a month now and nothing I've done has hurt it," Edler said Monday following a UBC session with the Thunderbirds and his locked-out peers. "There haven't been any red lights. I can do everything, but that doesn't mean I'm not feeling it. Sometimes it's sore and stiff, but it was sore and stiff last year and I played 82 games."

Edler underwent a microdisectomy procedure on Jan. 28, 2011 — four days after an open-ice hit from Dallas Stars forward Jamie Benn — to repair a herniated disc that wouldn't have healed on its own. He missed 10 weeks and returned for the second last game of the regular season. Last season, Edler endured back spasms and missed practices.

"After surgery, I don't think the back can get back to 100 per cent, but that doesn't mean you can't play at 100 per cent," added Edler. "(Another)

surgery would have been the last resort. I've been doing rehab and talking to doctors and it's been going the right way. Not quickly, but it's not getting worse, which is good. It's an injury that can be very frustrating because it takes a while

"The next step will be to play games and unfortunately we can't do that right now. I've been doing contact in practice, but it's different in a game. And I wouldn't be cleared unless the doctors and I were confident I could handle it. I don't know if I was 100 per cent last year, but it didn't affect me. I could play to my capacity and it's getting to a point where you can play and give 100 per cent.

"I've got to stay on top of it and maintain it and do whatever I need to do, but I'm not going to play a game and be cautious. That's not my way and not my style. If I don't feel good, I'll have to look into it."

And there's the rub.

Edler's \$3.25 million US contract is expiring and the 49 points he collected last season would merit a major pay increase on the open market. The Canucks have a salary structure in place on their back end and next season the cap hits are \$4.6 million for Kevin Bieksa and Jason Garrison, \$4.5 million for Dan Hamhuis and \$4.2 million for Keith Ballard. In a new collective bargaining agreement, the league wants the cap ceiling set at \$59.9 million next season and the Canucks already have 13 players under contract for 2013-14 at \$55.4 million. While there were contract extension discussions prior to the Sept. 15 lockout, locking up Elder long term is a matter of dollars and sense. He turns 27 in April and will be an unrestricted free agent next summer.

If the Canucks believe they have a budding Norris Trophy contender and not a player who lost his confidence and unravelled like a ball of string in the playoffs last spring, then creating sufficient cap space will be the challenge. And while the hometown discount theory has helped maintain roster sanity, Edler can look at what 50 points brought Christian Ehrhoff. The former Canuck took a giant leap from \$3.4 million here to a bonusladed 10-year, \$40 million free-agent deal from the Buffalo Sabres after the 2010-11 season. The eye-popping pact was so front-loaded it included an \$8 million signing bonus and \$10 million in the first year, plus a \$5 million bonus and \$8 million salary in the second year. Last season, Ehrhoff managed 32 points in 66 games for the struggling Sabres. One game the Canucks could play with Edler is to convince the blueliner to stick with a contending team rather than one searching for an identity.

Perhaps Edler and the Canucks can take comfort in how Daniel Sedin has progressed since lower-back surgery in May, 2001. Although it's difficult to compare back ailments, the winger suffered a herniated back at the world championship tournament in Germany and then struggled with only nine goals in his second season. But through maintenance and proper workout regimen, he won the Art Ross Trophy as leading scorer in 2010-11 with 41 goals and 104 points.

"Daniel had his injury and I don't know if he's completely 100 per cent, but you've got to get to a level," summed up Edler.

Whatever that level is, the Canucks will be more than curious.

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646640 Winnipeg Jets

Toby's glad to be back, lockout or no

Enstrom returns to city, practising with NHLers again

By: Tim Campbell

The wandering thing just wasn't working out for Winnipeg Jets defenceman Toby Enstrom.

It has been eight long months since he's played a meaningful game and he's back in Winnipeg to wait some more.

"It's been a long summer, a long workout," Enstrom said Monday at the MTS Iceplex, where he was working out with a cast of regular teammates and fellow locked-out NHLers. "I'm excited to get it going again so hopefully sooner than later we can start playing."

The 28-year-old Swedish-born blueliner made it clear Monday he wasn't in the mood for any questions about the NHL work stoppage, including legal, union and speculative angles.

When the lockout began in September, Enstrom waited a few weeks and then went to Austria to play in Salzburg.

He stayed there only a short time, playing in five games for the Red Bulls.

"They have a roster-cut deadline so I didn't want to go there and take somebody else's job so that made it easy for me make a decision to leave," he said. "I was hoping for the games to get going over here, too, so we'll wait and see what happens."

Enstrom said he was happy to be on the ice while he was there.

"Well, it was nice to be back playing again, that's for sure, it was fun."

With that stint cut short, Enstrom went to his homeland but couldn't find the work he wanted.

"My only option in Sweden was MODO," he said, naming the team he played for before moving full-time to the NHL in 2007. "And the Swedish Elite League didn't have the league open for NHL guys so I decided to wait and see what happens here around Christmas."

Numerous media outlets erroneously reported a month ago that Enstrom had signed in Orebro, a second-division team in Sweden where his brother Thomas plays.

"I don't know where you guys got that from," Enstrom said. "I didn't skate with any teams back home. I skated with some friends of mine and that was pretty much it."

His first season in Winnipeg, his fifth with the relocated Atlanta franchise, yielded six goals and 33 points. Enstrom missed 20 games due to injury, mostly in the first half of 2011-12.

With one season to go on the contract he signed in 2009, Enstrom was scheduled to earn \$4.5 million in 2012-13. In the off-season, he signed a five-year extension to that deal which will give him a raise to \$5.75 million per season, assuming NHL play will resume.

He said Monday that he thought Winnipeg was a good place to turn after little play in Europe.

"This is my home now," Enstrom said. "It feels good to be back. I miss the guys, too. To see some of the guys, be practising with them, it felt like a good choice for me."

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.18.2012

646641 Winnipeg Jets

Jets blueliner happy to be home

By: Tim Campbell

WINNIPEG — Toby Enstrom says that Winnipeg is his home now and that's why he's back here, even though NHL players are still locked out.

The Swedish-born Jets defenceman was at the MTS Iceplex again this morning, skating with teammates and other locked-out NHL skaters. He returned to the Manitoba capital last week after a stint in Europe.

"This is my home now," Enstrom said today. " It feels good to be back. I miss the guys, too. To see some of the guys, be practising with them, it felt like a good choice for me."

When the lockout began in September, the 28-year-old blueliner waited a few weeks and then went to Austria to play in Salzburg.

He stayed there only a short time.

"They have a roster-cut deadline so I didn't want to go there and take somebody else's job so that made it easy for me make a decision to leave," he said. "I was hoping for the games to get going over here, too, so we'll wait and see what happens."

Enstrom told reporters this morning that he didn't want to talk about the lockout itself.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.18.2012

646642 Websites

ESPN / Only winning move is not to play

By Scott Burnside

There was a doctrine that became popular during the Cold War of the 1940s and '50s known as mutually assured destruction.

The U.S. and Russia emerged as world super powers, and despite having seen the destruction of the atomic bombs in Japan near the end of World War II, both sides continued to stockpile weapons of mass destruction. The theory was that as long as both countries controlled a similar mass of weaponry and had the capability of using it even after a first strike, neither side would employ such tactics knowing that they, too, would be wiped out.

In short, mutually assured destruction explains a dynamic in which opposing sides never got to war because such a war would be without winners. It explains at least in part why such a cataclysmic battle has never been waged.

Yes, having the weaponry is part of the dynamic, but presumably the knowledge that everything is at stake resulted in clearer vision. If there's nothing left, why push the button?

The NHL and NHLPA might do well do engage in a little history lesson before they continue to totter off down the road toward a war without winners, toward an escalating battle where what or who survives is completely unknown.

As the lockout has dragged on, the two sides have grown further apart both in terms of their demands and in terms of reality, and with that separation more and more extreme measures have been discussed and debated.

The players took the first step in upping the armament ante by asking its membership to vote on whether to give the union's executive committee the power to file a disclaimer of interest with the NHL, essentially dissolving the union and setting the stage for immediate filing of antitrust suits against the leadule.

The move -- players began voting Sunday and will continue voting through the week -- did not imply that the union would necessarily follow that path but merely implied the threat of taking such a path.

It was yet another shot across the NHL's bow, another message that the players will not back down, that they believe the league has consistently bullied them at the bargaining table and they will take whatever means available to see that they get a fair deal.

The league quickly reacted by filing an unfair labor practice suit with the National Labor Relations Board suggesting that a disclaimer of interest was a sham aimed only at trying to pressure the league into making a better deal with the union.

The league also filed a class action suit in federal court in New York to reinforce that the lockout of the players that began on Sept. 15 is legal. One of the elements of that suit is a clause that asks the court to wipe out all existing contracts if the players are successful in having the union dissolved.

The logic is that since all the player contracts are negotiated under the umbrella of a collective bargaining agreement that was negotiated by the NHLPA and the NHL, if the courts rule that structure has been dissolved, then the contracts negotiated under that umbrella would be null and void.

There is a certain hilarity on both sides of the legal posturing or possible legal posturing

The union may claim that it can't function as a union because the owners are so intransigent. And yet the system that is now decried by the players is the same one that saw the salary cap grow from \$39 million after the last lockout to a shade over \$70 million this past summer. Yup. System doesn't work for the players. Not one bit.

The owners, of course, have been hammering away at union leadership, trying their best through various forms of dirty tricks to separate the union

from leader Donald Fehr. Now the league's lawsuit insists that everyone is better off with the union intact presumably under Fehr's leadership.

Is anyone happier to see the two sides head in this direction more than the phalanx of lawyers whose meters are running in overdrive? But it's better to pay the lawyers than settle and start making money of your own.

People, this is a game -- a game that created \$3.3 billion last season -- and you represent a group that is among the most privileged of all people on the continent. Your legal squabbling takes an already embarrassing legal imbroglio to absurd heights.

And here's the funny part: All of this maneuvering was entirely expected given the current landscape and the urgency to get a deal done to save at least some of the 2012-13 season.

Many hockey observers still believe all of this: the voting on a potential disclaimer of interest and the suits filed in court and with the NLRB is an elaborate final set piece before the two sides breathe deeply and make a deal to save not just some of the current season but maybe the game itself.

Whether or not the past few days are simply part of an ongoing charade of stupidity, they bring us closer to the point of the unthinkable. Forget this season if these two parties step through the legal porthole. Once this goes to court, all bets are off. Antitrust suits could mean irreparable damage to the league and its teams. The union could, of course, fail and be wiped out. What if the league was successful in having all contracts struck down regardless of other rulings? What would the NHL look like? How long would such a battle take? How many teams would be left standing at the end of a protracted legal battle no matter who "won"? Perhaps most importantly, who would care when it was all over with?

Indeed, who cares now?

These are the kinds of questions that have fueled countless doomsday movies and books. Sometimes the madmen -- and there is invariably a madman or two bent on total destruction in these cautionary tales -- is stopped. Sometimes there is an epiphany or a heroic gesture or sacrifice.

In some stories, the ending is much bleaker.

These are the kinds of questions and storylines that should be keeping players and owners up at night.

Goodness help us if they're not.

ESPN LOADED: 12.18.2012

646643 Websites

ESPN / No winning this lame blame game

By Pierre LeBrun

First, let's be a man and admit when we're wrong.

My summer outlook for the NHL lockout months ago was puck drop by mid-December.

Wrong, wrong, wrong.

Nope, the most illogical and incomprehensible labor battle in the history of pro sports has found a way to drag its way into the holiday season.

Somehow, a deal that isn't that far away at all -- on paper, at least -- is threatening to get worse with the legal battle now under way between the NHL and NHL Players' Association.

The only hope of having any hockey this season is if the looming threat of the union dissolving itself and the two sides duking it out in court provides one last jolt of urgency to the moderates on both sides to try to get over the final hurdles of this deal.

As of Monday morning, however, no talks were scheduled between the NHL and NHLPA.

So what now?

"We will continue to explore options for moving the process forward, and we hope the players' association is doing the same," deputy commissioner Bill Daly told ESPN.com via email Monday morning.

"Time is obviously getting short."

"We are ready, willing, able and eager to negotiate," NHLPA outside counsel Steve Fehr told ESPN colleague Katie Strang on Monday night. "We want to get an agreement and we want to get it done as soon as possible."

There is no official drop-dead date, although most people around the hockey world believe mid-January looms large in that regard.

Commissioner Gary Bettman has said anything less than a 48-game season wouldn't cut it, so you can't drop the puck past January and expect to pull that off, even with hockey in late June, which the league is prepared to do.

What is needed at this point is for one side to provide one more compromised offer, one that the moderate representatives could bring to their respective constituencies for a vote. Moderates on both sides have indicated to ESPN.com over the past few days that is how this thing finally ends

Problem is, they disagree on how to come up with that proposal. The folks on the league/ownership side say it's up to the NHLPA to come up with the next proposal. The players we've talked to tell ESPN.com they believe it's up to the league to provide the next offer.

Picture me now banging my head against the wall. Repeatedly.

At holiday party gatherings over the past week, people from different walks of life approached me and asked just what this labor dispute is about and why it's dragged out so long. I now fumble for an answer. I'm not sure I can even provide a legitimate answer anymore.

I know this: I lay plenty of blame for the decision-making on both sides.

Looking back, the NHL made a terrible strategic mistake back in July with an original offer that asked for players to accept 43 percent of hockey-related revenue, down from the 57 percent it had in the previous deal. I cannot tell you how many level-headed NHL players -- not militants but rather moderates -- have told me repeatedly how that first offer from the NHL in July felt like a punch to the head and galvanized the player membership in a way in which NHLPA executive director Don Fehr likely could have never managed on his own.

That offer set the tone for the level of mistrust that has plagued what should have been a simpler negotiation, the players knowing deep down all along that they'd be accepting a 50-50 split of revenues.

On the other side of things, Fehr is also showing his true colors of late. The longtime baseball union leader seems hard to pin down. It just seems like whenever the league moves on what Fehr deemed a critical issue -- such as funding the "make-whole" provision and then upping it to \$300 million -- the NHLPA boss finds new demands to throw the league's way, the latest being his desire to cap escrow as part of the transition rules.

All of which just feeds into the long-held criticism from NHL owners that Fehr can't close a deal.

Let's be clear here: The players have done most of the giving in this negotiation. There's no way you can argue otherwise. But as I've long maintained, that had to be the understood context of this negotiation from Day 1. After labor deals in the NFL and NBA last year in which players backed up financially, it was clear NHL players were going to be subject to the same end result. It's an industry standard you can't escape.

So Fehr's responsibility all along was to make the best out of that negative backdrop. And in many ways, he has. His patience in this negotiation has helped get his membership the kind of offer from the league that I never imagined would ever be available -- \$300 million in "make-whole"? -- but there comes a time when you have to know when to cut your losses.

Not having a 2012-13 season will irreparably damage the NHL industry.

And in a comment that I'm hearing more and more from people on the ownership side, I'm not sure the NHL returns with 30 teams on the other side of a lost season. Can the weaker markets truly survive this? That's damage both sides would feel.

I'm not sure it's possible anymore to shake off the emotion that has suffocated logical thought. But here's hoping it is.

Because getting a deal done is the only option that truly makes any sense. Well, at least for anyone who still cares about the game itself anymore.

ESPN LOADED: 12.18.2012