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Plum native, 'Coach' Umberger proud of hometown

Union continues review of NHL's new offer

NHL owners, players union plot next move in negotiations

Representatives of the NHL and the players' association spoke by phone on Saturday to clarify and discuss the proposed collective bargaining agreement the league presented late Thursday. The sides did not arrange a face-to-face bargaining session for Sunday, but it's possible they will meet late in the day in New York.

"We do plan on continuing [Sunday] morning the 'informational' sessions we had today," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said Saturday. "Then we will see."

The NHL's proposal included a deadline to have a deal in place in time to open training camps on Jan. 12 and start the season on Jan. 19 or the season would be canceled. Commissioner Gary Bettman has said a 48-game schedule is the minimum for a season with "integrity." After the

resolution of a labor dispute that cut short the 1994-95 season, teams played 48 games within their respective conferences. The league lost the 2004-05 season to a labor dispute.

LA Times: LOADED: 12.30.2012 647197 Anaheim Ducks

Latest proposal could restart stalled NHL labor talks

ERIC STEPHENS

The NHL and NHL Players' Association appear to be on the path toward resuming formal negotiations after the two sides held multiple informational sessions Saturday to discuss the league's newest labor proposal.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told the Register that the sides will communicate again Sunday morning in an informational sense but added that no collective bargaining sessions have been scheduled.

Article Tab: NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, left, and deputy commissioner Bill Daly, walk together in Toronto in this file photo. There was optimism Saturday that talks in the NHL labor dispute could resume soon.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, left, and deputy commissioner Bill Daly, walk together in Toronto in this file photo. There was optimism Saturday that talks in the NHL labor dispute could resume soon.

CHRIS YOUNG, AP

Talks between the league and players' union went dormant two weeks ago after negotiations with federal mediators failed to close the gap that is keeping the sides from instituting a labor agreement to end the lockout, now 105 days old.

But a new offer from the NHL on Thursday that included some movement in the players' direction on contract demands has sparked discussion. If all goes well, it is likely that face-to-face sessions could resume Sunday night or Monday morning.

The union is not commenting on the owners' proposal. Daly wouldn't speculate on where the talks could go after its offer.

"Hard to know how union received proposal at this point," Daly said in an email. "We'll see where it goes tomorrow."

Both sides are under pressure to get a new labor deal done and salvage the season. The league reportedly set a Jan. 11 deadline so that a 48-game schedule would begin Jan. 19.

It would likely resemble 1995 when teams played all 48 games within their conference after a 103-day lockout shortened that regular-season schedule.

The NHL offered to increase the limit on player contracts from five years to six and keep intact a seven-year maximum for teams that re-sign their own free agents. The league is also willing to up the amount on salary variance between years on contracts from 5 percent to 10 percent and keep current rules for unrestricted free agency and salary arbitration.

A \$60 million salary cap would be in place for 2013-14 while each team would be able to make one compliance buyout before that season, which would count against the players' share of revenue and not a team's cap figure. The league is also seeking a 10-year agreement with a mutual optout after eight.

The union has previously offered to limit player contracts to eight years and wanted an eight-year deal with an opt-out after six. It isn't known if NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr and his group will negotiate off the NHL offer or come up with its own counterproposal.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 12.30.2012

647198 Boston Bruins

Can't box him in

Ron Borges

The Workingman rose at 5 a.m. and was in the gym hoisting weights by 6:15. After 90 minutes of iron work, he drives to BU's hockey rink to join a fellowship of similarly out-of-work Workingmen to skate for two hours. If there is a point to this, some days it doesn't seem so.

After firing enough shots to make his elbows ache, The Workingman leaves around 11, his day far from over, although none of it is producing a dime. By 4:30 p.m., he's at The Ring Boxing Club on Commonwealth Avenue, trainer Tommy McInerney awaiting him with pads in hand and numbers in head

"1-2, 1-2!" McInerney shouts, demanding a left jab-right cross born from boxing's mysterious numerology.

"4-2," meaning right hook, right cross, then "5-2!" meaning left uppercut, right cross (Mike Tyson's KO combination). In three-minute intervals this continues for an hour, his hands popping the pads with a resounding slapslap!

"2-4-4-2, 1-2, 1-1-2, 5-2! Move your hands," McInerney urges. The Workingman was pretty sure he had been, but with sweat dripping off him for the third time on this 103rd day of unemployment, he continues working at a job he no longer has.

That has been 35-year-old Shawn Thornton's regular routine since NHL owners decided to lock their players out, demanding they reduce their share of hockey revenue from 57 percent to 43. One wonders why the owners didn't just start at 0, because that's pretty much where things have been since Sept. 15, the day they decided even though the NHL was coming off arguably its best year, it wasn't enough.

Thornton knows he's close to the end of his best hockey years and thus can ill afford the kind of protracted job action taken against him by penurious owners (who would be the first to tell him it's not personal, even though it sure feels like it). He also knows he's played more minor league games (605) than NHL ones (450), and well remembers the difference.

Yet there are limits even for someone who rode buses to some of hockey's smallest outposts for 10 years. He is not an unappreciative employee, but then again he was finally set to crack the \$1 million salary mark this season at 36 after agreeing to a two-year extension in March, but if hockey's business militants got all they wanted, that contract would have paid him less than he earned last year. Thankfully, it's not personal.

We're not talking about Alex Ovechkin money here. We're not talking about the 100 or so players earning \$5 million or more. We're talking about a guy trying to make a living for a very limited time the hard way: with his fists and his face.

"My experience is different than most guys," Thornton said several days before Thursday's new offer from the owners provided hope for a breakthrough that may get them all playing before what looms as a mid-January drop-dead date. "I was never picked for any elite teams. In juniors most guys think of taking hockey to the next level. I didn't think that would happen for me. I really played for love of the game.

"If it was up to me I'd be playing, but it isn't. We're locked out. It's not like we had a choice. I thought the game was in such a good spot seven months ago. You couldn't have written a better script. You'd like to think this is about the game but it doesn't look like it is. If it's not, what do they want?"

Since the lockout began, all Thornton could do was skate, lift, worry and work on the skill that got him on two Stanley Cup champions: fighting.

Because of that, he is a man of few illusions. He has been forced by the absence of the great gifts someone like Ovechkin has known since birth to look at his occupation as most men must: Keep your tools sharp and hope for work.

"I like getting up at 5 and doing what it takes to stay in shape," he said. "I like getting the day going. I'm 35. I have to work twice as hard to keep up with guys like Tyler (Seguin, the Bruins' 20-year-old phenom). Even if I was 25 it would be the same with my skills.

"Some days when we're skating, you can feel the ebb and flow of the negotiations. When they haven't talked in two weeks it's hard to push, but if it ever comes back I'll be ready."

Thornton is still hopeful that will happen in time for a 50-game season and playoffs for which, by the way, players are not paid. It's preferable to

listening to talk of "variances" and arguments to cap player contracts at five years or to reduce the salary cap.

Thornton knows what's coming, which is serious beheadings as well as a salary this year less than half of what he was scheduled to make. Whether he ever sees that magic \$1 million remains to be seen, but at the moment it doesn't matter as much as getting up in the dark to start a workday with no pay but plenty of sweat.

"I gotta believe we're close," he said. "I wouldn't be going on five-mile runs on Christmas if I didn't. At night you feel like a healthy scratch, but at least you know if they called on you, you were ready."

Boston Herald LOADED: 12.30.2012

647199 Boston Bruins

Bruins unable to shake their Cup hangover

Stephen Harris

The Bruins reached the end of the 2011-12 regular season with a record most NHL teams would have coveted:

- 49-29-4, good for 102 points.
- · First place in the Northeast Division
- No. 2 seed in the Eastern Conference.
- The second most goals-scored in the NHL (269) and the sixth fewest goals-against (199).

But the manner in which they built those numbers left a lot to be desired. And so did the entirely-too-brief playoff appearance that followed, a first-round defeat against the Washington Capitals. Thus ended one of the most erratic B's seasons in memory.

When they were good, they were unbelievable; the rest of the time, really rather mediocre.

And unfortunately for the B's and their fans, there was no chance during the second half of 2012 to see if this team could bounce back to the championship form of 2010-11.

Hopes were high for the 2012-13 Bruins, but all that vanished with the owners' lockout — robbing fans of the opportunity to watch one of hockey's strongest and deepest teams take a run at another Stanley Cup.

Looking back over 2012, the Bruins obviously wrote a rich new chapter in the Book of Stanley Cup Hangovers.

After starting the 2011-12 season 3-7-0 — due to a predictable lack of physical and emotional readiness after their Cup win and a short and busy summer — the strangest thing happened.

From Nov. 1 to Dec. 30, 2011, they rode a high the like of which NHL teams have ever experienced, a 21-2-1 run during which the B's weren't just beating teams, they were crushing them.

"You can't put into words how the last year and a half have gone," winger Brad Marchand said after his first career hat trick in the 8-0 demolition of the Panthers on Dec. 23, 2011, at the Garden.

It was a heady time for the Bruins and their faithful, as the Bruins went 30-7-2 in November, December and January. Included in that span were stretches of 14-0-1 and 7-0-0.

"We don't know how we're going to win every night," goalie Tim Thomas said then. "We're going to do it different ways with different guys, but all of us together at the same time."

Winning seemed automatic. The Bruins stepped on the ice knowing it. So did their opponents. Across the NHL, one analyst after another conceded unequivocally that the Bruins were by far the top team in the league. With the season not even half over, the only question left was, which Western Conference team would the B's face, and inevitably defeat, in the 2012 Cup final?

But like Icarus, the Bruins flew too high. And then they came down to earth with a thud. The Stanley Cup Hangover, Stage 2, kicked in big time during the first four months of 2012.

There were warning signs earlier, but the turning point may have been after a 6-5 shootout win in Philadelphia on Jan. 22, which left the B's with a 31-13-2 record. After that game, the team fell into a 9-14-1 rut. The rest of the season, they lost nearly as frequently as they won, going 18-16-2.

A 9-2-1 finish provided hope the team was back on track in time for the first-round playoff clash against the Capitals.

A veteran NHL scout assessed the B's playoff hopes: "The direction the team was going at the finish of the season, compared to where they were a few weeks earlier when they were still trying to figure out what kind of team this was, makes the picture a lot brighter."

The playoff series started OK, with Chris Kelly's overtime goal providing a 1-0 Game 1 win. But after dropping Game 2 in double overtime, 2-1, it was evident to the Bruins that the Capitals had evolved from a wide open, attacking team into a club stressing tight defense.

The B's took Game 3, 4-3, but the Caps again knotted the series with a 2-1 win in D.C., after which coach Claude Julien said his team lacked the commitment to get to the goalmouth and score.

Julien shook up his lines for Game 5 in Boston, but the Caps then stunned the B's, 4-3, taking a 3-2 series lead. The B's showed real grit in winning Game 6 in Washington, 4-3, on Tyler Seguin's OT goal.

But the Caps prevailed in Game 7 at the Garden, 2-1 — their third road win in the series — on fourth-liner Joel Ward's goal at 2:57 of overtime. It was the first seven-game series in NHL history in which all the games were decided by one goal. The Bruins offense, so awesome back in the early months of the season, just couldn't get the job done at the end.

"Our team as a whole wasn't the team we know we could have been," Julien said. "We didn't have that energy level that you normally see with our team when it's at its best. That's the unfortunate part, is we know there was more in us than what we showed in that first round."

It appeared at season's end that the Bruins would have to move forward without Thomas, their two-time Vezina Trophy goalie and 2011 playoff MVP. He had made headlines Jan. 23 when he declined to show up for the team's White House visit, explaining, "I believe the federal government has grown out of control, threatening the rights, liberties and property of the people."

And on June 1, the team confirmed rumors that Thomas intended to take a year off from hockey, ostensibly to spend more time with his family at their new Colorado home. Because of the lockout, the AWOL goalie, who has one year (\$5 million cap hit) left on his contract, has not yet been suspended. At age 38, his Bruins' and NHL futures remain uncertain.

Despite the quick playoff exit, general manager Peter Chiarelli was happy with his team. Indeed, his task throughout the season and into the summer was to re-sign his own free agent forwards to new deals: Seguin (six years, \$5.75 million-a-year), Milan Lucic (three years, \$6 million per), Marchand (four years, \$4.5 million average), Daniel Paille (three years, \$1.3 million-a-year). And Julien got a new deal, too.

Thomas' decision to sit out a season left the Bruins to turn to Tuukka Rask as the No. 1 goalie.

"We lost in the first round, after having won the Cup last year," Chiarelli said. "But to me, we can go after the Cup again next year. I have every confidence we can do that."

If and when the lockout ends and the Bruins get back on the ice.

Boston Herald LOADED: 12.30.2012

647200 Buffalo Sabres

Amerks victorious in return to Buffalo

John Vogl

Cody Hodgson is back on the ice for the Rochester Americans and showing why the Buffalo Sabres have such high expectations for him.

The fans in Buffalo got to see his turnaround firsthand Friday night. Hodgson scored two picturesque goals in First Niagara Center to help lead the Amerks to a 4-1 victory over Lake Erie.

Here are highlights courtesy of the Amerks (video begins at about 11-second mark).

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.30.2012

647201 Buffalo Sabres

Rochester Amerks fall behind early in loss to Senators

Kevin Oklobzija

Kevin's 3 stars

- 1. Corey Cowick, LW, Senators \dots Scored 1 goal, had 3 shots, always around the net.
- 2. Andre Benoit, D, Senators ... Played 261/2 minutes, made many efficient plays.
- 3. Brian Flynn, RW, Amerks ... Created the lone goal, played with pizzazz.

There have been plenty of nights when T.J. Brennan has been one of the heroes for the Rochester Americans.

He has scored big goals. He has scored lots of goals, too; a team-leading 12 to be exact.

He has created offense from the point, which is a big reason he is tied for the team lead in assists with 17.

At the other end, he has moved the puck to safety in the defensive zone and also cleared the deep slot so goalie David Leggio can see shots.

But on Saturday night the fourth-year defenseman wasn't pleased with how he played in a 2-1 loss to the Binghamton Senators.

Looking for someone to blame? Brennan said just point the finger at him.

"Dumb penalties, stupid plays and laziness," he said, critiquing his play in front of 8,514 fans at Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester Community War Memorial.

Long after some of his teammates had made their way through the shower and out of the rink, Brennan was still sitting in his locker stall, replaying his night in his mind.

He was clearly frustrated with his some of the things he did — like putting a 30-foot first-period pass into the skates of his partner, Jerome Gauthier-Leduc, instead of onto the stick or taking a high-sticking minor midway through the third period that nullified an Amerks power play.

"I took a couple bad penalties," he said.

He tipped his hat to goalie Robin Lehner for a great glove save in the second period, but even so he figured he should have instead created a rebound with his shot.

The consternation wasn't limited to just his own play, though. The team continues to be a maddening example of inconsistency.

They have a 15-12-2-1 record, which very much defines mediocrity. For those who think a loss is a loss, whether it's in regulation, overtime or a shootout, then the Amerks are right at .500 (15-15).

"That's where we're at," coach Ron Rolston said. "It's kind of where we've been the whole season to date."

He's so very right, too. With just two days left in December, the Amerks have managed to string together three consecutive victories just once, and that was on run back on Oct. 19, 20, and 23.

But they had just defeated the Lake Erie Monsters in back-to-back games, 7-6 in a shootout on Wednesday and 4-1 at Buffalo on Friday, so Saturday gave them another chance for the elusive third straight win.

And after six minutes they found themselves in a 2-0 hole. So much for that.

Derek Grant scored at 4:18 when his slap shot from the left circle struck the stick of Amerks defenseman Mark Pysyk and deflected up and past the blocker of Leggio. He had no chance to react to the change of direction.

Just 1:42 later, defenseman Brayden McNabb got burned when he tried to make a play at the point. Instead, the Senators sprinted away on a two-on-one fast break.

Leggio stopped Hugh Jessiman's shot from the right circle but the big rebound was hammered into the net by the trailer on the play, Corey Cowick

"He was shooting for the rebound," Rolston said of Jessiman's slapper off the leg pad.

Which is why Rolston had no problem with how Leggio played (27 saves).

"I thought he was good again tonight," Rolston said. "We had a slow start (as a team) but I liked the way we rebounded off of it."

Democrat and Chronicle LOADED: 12.30.2012

647202 Chicago Blackhawks

Lots of questions, still no answers in the NHL labor fight.

Staff Writer

NEW YORK — The league and the players' association spent much of Saturday talking to each other via conference call. The conversations were strictly for the purpose of sharing information regarding the new contract offer the NHL made to the union late Thursday.

The initial thought was that the sides would get together Sunday in New York to hold official negotiations for the first time in weeks, but those weren't scheduled before discussions ended Saturday.

Staff level calls were expected to resume Sunday, which could include face-to-face talks at some point, but no actual bargaining meetings have been set.

"Some more informational sessions in the morning," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Associated Press regarding Sunday. "Nothing planned beyond that."

The union pored over the latest NHL proposal aimed at ending the lockout that reached its 105th day Saturday and saving the delayed hockey season. The league would like to reach a deal no later than Jan. 11, which would allow training camps to start the following day, and a 48-game season to begin Jan. 19.

Saturday's conference calls were scheduled Friday night so the union could ask league officials questions about the nearly 300-page proposal. Whether enough progress will be made to lead to face-to-face talks remains to be seen.

The sides haven't gotten together since Dec. 13 with federal mediators. Bargaining sessions with only the NHL and union involved haven't been held since Dec. 6, when talks abruptly ended after the players' association made a counterproposal to the league's previous offer. The league said that offer was contingent on the union accepting three elements unconditionally and without further bargaining.

The NHL then pulled all existing offers off the table. Two days of sessions with mediators the following week ended without any progress made.

The players' association's executive board and negotiating committee went over the new proposal during an internal conference call Friday.

A person familiar with key points of the offer told The Associated Press that the league proposed raising the limit of individual free-agent contracts to six years from five — seven years if a team re-signs its own player; raising the

salary variance from one year to another to 10 percent, up from 5 percent; and one compliance buyout for the 2013-14 season that wouldn't count toward a team's salary cap but would be included in the overall players' share of income.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because details of the new offer weren't being discussed publicly.

The NHL maintained the deferred payment amount of \$300 million it offered in its previous proposal, an increase from an earlier offer of \$211 million. The initial \$300 million offer was pulled off the table after negotiations broke off earlier this month.

The latest proposal is for 10 years, running through the 2021-22 season, with both sides having the right to opt out after eight years.

The lockout has reached a critical stage, threatening to shut down a season for the second time in eight years. All games through Jan. 14, plus the Winter Classic and the All-Star game already have been called off. The next round of cuts could claim the entire schedule.

The NHL is the only North American professional sports league to cancel a season because of a labor dispute, losing the 2004-05 campaign to a lockout. A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January.

It is still possible this dispute could eventually be settled in the courts if the sides can't reach a deal on their own.

The NHL filed a class-action suit this month in U.S. District Court in New York in an effort to show its lockout is legal. In a separate move, the league filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board, contending bad-faith bargaining by the union.

Those moves were made because the players' association took steps toward potentially filing a "disclaimer of interest," which would dissolve the union and make it a trade association. That would allow players to file antitrust lawsuits against the NHL.

Union members voted overwhelmingly to give their board the power to file the disclaimer by Jan. 2. If that deadline passes, another authorization vote could be held to approve a later filing.

Negotiations between the NHL and the union have been at a standstill since talks ended Dec. 6. One week later, the sides convened again with federal mediators in New Jersey, but still couldn't make progress.

The sides have been unable to reach agreement on the length of the new deal, the length of individual player contracts, and the variance in salary from year to year. The NHL is looking for an even split of revenues with players.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 12.30.2012

647203 Columbus Blue Jackets

NHL: Union continues to consider latest proposal

Aaron Portzline

NHL labor talks were rekindled late last week when the league, fearing a second canceled season in eight years, reached out with a proposal to the NHL Players' Association.

They remained in a precarious state yesterday, with the clear knowledge on both sides that this likely is the last best chance to spare even a shortened season. The league and the union touched base repeatedly, mixing long, tedious conversations with shorter chats as the union sought clarity on the issues addressed by the NHL's 300-plus page proposal made Thursday.

The NHL, in its proposal, seeks a Jan. 11 deadline for signing off on a collective bargaining agreement. That would allow training camps to open the next day and a 48-game regular season to begin on Jan. 19. NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly has confirmed the league's proposal, but would not confirm any of the specifics revealed by ESPN and Canadian sports network TSN.The league's offer is for a 10-year agreement, with a mutual opt-out clause after eight seasons. The NHL seeks a six-year limit on player contracts (up from five in its previous offer), a 10 percent

maximum variance from year to year on contracts (up from 5 percent) and one contract buyout per team before the 2013-14 season.

The buyout would not count against the \$60 million salary-cap figure — meaning more money would be freed up to be spend on players — but it would count toward the players' 50 percent share of hockey-related revenues.

The NHL also seeks a tweak to the NHL draft lottery format, allowing all 14 nonplayoff clubs — not just the lowest five clubs in the overall standings — to have a shot at the No. 1 overall pick. The union expects to have more questions for the NHL today regarding its proposal. If traction is achieved, the sides could meet late today or early Monday for formal talks.

Already, the NHL has canceled all games through Jan. 14 — 625 regularseason games, including the Winter Classic, which would have taken place in Ann Arbor, Mich., on Tuesday. Also canceled was the NHL All-Star Game, which was scheduled for Nationwide Arena on Jan. 26-27.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 12.30.2012

647204 Dallas Stars

NHL, union spend day on conference calls

IRA PODELL

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{NEW}}$ YORK — Lots of questions, but still no answers in the NHL labor fight.

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The players' association's executive board and negotiating committee went over the new proposal during an internal conference call Friday.

A person familiar with key points of the offer told The Associated Press that the league proposed raising the limit of individual free-agent contracts to six years from five - seven years if a team re-signs its own player; raising the salary variance from one year to another to 10 percent, up from 5 percent; and one compliance buyout for the 2013-14 season that wouldn't count toward a team's salary cap but would be included in the overall players' share of income.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because details of the new offer weren't being discussed publicly.

The NHL maintained the deferred payment amount of \$300 million it offered in its previous proposal, an increase from an earlier offer of \$211 million. The initial \$300 million offer was pulled off the table after negotiations broke off earlier this month.

The latest proposal is for 10 years, running through the 2021-22 season, with both sides having the right to opt out after eight years.

The lockout has reached a critical stage, threatening to shut down a season for the second time in eight years. All games through Jan. 14, plus the Winter Classic and the All-Star game already have been called off. The next round of cuts could claim the entire schedule.

The NHL is the only North American professional sports league to cancel a season because of a labor dispute, losing the 2004-05 campaign to a lockout. A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January.

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Union members voted overwhelmingly to give their board the power to file the disclaimer by Jan. 2. If that deadline passes, another authorization vote could be held to approve a later filing.

Negotiations between the NHL and the union have been at a standstill since talks ended Dec. 6. One week later, the sides convened again with federal mediators in New Jersey, but still couldn't make progress.

The sides have been unable to reach agreement on the length of the new deal, the length of individual player contracts, and the variance in salary from year to year. The NHL is looking for an even split of revenues with players.

Star-Telegram LOADED: 12.30.2012

647205 Detroit Red Wings

The 'Stevies': Matt Millen, Lomas Brown, the Winter Classic and more

Staff Writer

Each week, Steve Schrader hands out "Stevies" to the best, the worst and the weirdest from the week that was:

The "And What If Joey Hadn't Been Available?" award

To former Lions GM Matt Millen, who said that if Calvin Johnson hadn't been available, he would have taken Adrian Peterson with the No. 2 pick in the 2007 draft. Really? The year he made the pick of his front-office career, Millen also had an amazing Plan B ready to go? OK, sure. But why do I have the feeling that if Oakland had drafted Johnson No. 1, lots of Lions fans would now be wondering what to do with their old JaMarcus Russell jerseys?

The "Just Flip a Coin" award

To current Lions GM Martin Mayhew, who now faces his annual dilemma: Should he draft for need or take the best player available? Well, that shouldn't be a problem this season, no matter which way he goes. What do you get a team that needs everything? Anything.

The "Drop a Dime on Yourself" award

To Lomas Brown, who said on ESPN Radio he once missed a block on purpose to get former Lions quarterback Scott Mitchell out of a game, which is about the dumbest thing you can do. The next dumbest is telling everybody about it 18 years later for no good reason. Talk about throwing your reputation under the bus.

The "Game Off!" award

To the Winter Classic, which would have been this week at the Big House. In honor of its -- we hope -- temporary passing, take your lawn chair out in the backyard Tuesday and sit out there for 3 hours or so in the 25-degree temperatures, drinking beer and not watching hockey. Compiled by STEVE SCHRADER, who can be reached at 313-222-6710 or sschrader@freepress.com.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.30.2012

647206 Detroit Red Wings

NHL, players' association share information but nothing else

Ira Podell

New York — Lots of questions, but still no answers in the NHL labor fight.

The league and the players' association spent much of Saturday talking to each other via conference call. The conversations were strictly for the purpose of sharing information regarding the new contract offer the NHL made to the union late Thursday.

The initial thought was that the sides would get together Sunday in New York to hold official negotiations for the first time in weeks, but those weren't scheduled before discussions ended Saturday.

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Detroit News LOADED: 12.30.2012

647207 Edmonton Oilers

How would Oilers cope with \$60 million salary cap ceiling next season?

Jim Matheson

The NHL players union will almost certainly fight the NHL's plan for a \$60 million salary cap next season—that's one of the players' hills to possibly die on as they get set to talk face-to-face with the clock ticking on a season of 48 games. But if they agree to the drop from \$70.2 million ceiling this season and grumble, but also agree, to one compliance player buyout by teams in 2013-2014 (not counting against the cap) to ease the team's financial pain, where does this put the Oilers?

The good folks at capgeek.com (where would we be without them as a reference point?) says the Oilers have contract obligations to 14 players (nine forwards, four defencemen and one goalie Devan Dubnyk) for 2013-2014, and it adds up to \$46.580 million. That only leaves \$13.420 million to sign nine players to get to the NHL roster max of 23. That's not much cap breathing room when you consider the contracts of Ladislav Smid, Sam Gagner, Ryan Whitney, Ryan Jones, Teemu Hartikainen, Magnus Paajarvi and Theo Peckham would be up and you would think they would want to sign the majority of those players, or they'd have to find cheaper ones on their farm or other players to take their place on the open market.

Smid, Whitney and Jones would be unrestricted free-agents in July of 2013, the others restricted FAs. They would need a goalie to sign, as well, because Nikolai Khabibulin won't be back for 2013-2014, and unless they see farmhand Yann Danis as an NHL backup, they will need somebody to partner with Dubnyk.

Some of the get-out-of-jail cards that NHL clubs would use on players with big tickets are obvious: S cott Gomez in Montreal and Wade Redden in New York. Redden has played the last two years on their farm in Hartford and Gomez somehow lost his game and well-earned rep as a Cup winner in New Jersey when he went to the Rangers and then to the Habs. He's a shadow of his old self.

Would the Oilers consider using a one-time compliance buyout on their captain Shawn Horcoff, who would have two years left at a cap hit of \$5.5 million? Lots of Oilers' fans would love that. Horcoff has become their favourite whipping boy, as if he stuck a gun to anybody's head to get the largesse he's enjoyed the last few years.

Me? I like Horcoff as a player; like his work ethic, like his fitness, like his gamesmanship. I think he's the right guy to wear the C, although at his age (35 at next season's training camp) I also know he might be better served as a valuable third-liner on a Cup contender, at, say, \$3 million.

But Horcoff got his \$5.5 million cap here without putting up much of a fight. The Oilers gave it to him, willingly. His salary isn't his fault. If his role on the Oilers wasn't changing with a core of kids leading the way, we wouldn't be talking buyout and Horcoff in the same sentence, but the Oilers, if they're looking to cut corners, might ruminate on it next season.

Here's the players the Oilers have signed for next season, and their cap hit, when the cap could be \$60 million:

Taylor Hall, \$6 million.

Jordan Eberle, \$6 million.

Shawn Horcoff, \$5.5 million.

Ales Hemsky, \$5 million.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, \$3.775 million.

Justin Schultz, 3.775 million.

Nail Yakupov, \$3.775 million.

Devan Dubnyk, \$3.5 million.

Nick Schultz, \$3.5 million.

Ryan Smyth, \$2.25 million.

Jeff Petry, \$1.75 million.

Eric Belanger, \$1.75 million.

Ben Eager, \$1.1 million

Corey Potter, \$775,000.

Say you give Smid \$4 million in a new deal, and the same for Whitney, then \$3.5 million for Gagner, \$1.5 million for Jones, and Hartikainen and Paajarvi are \$1 million each. That's \$15 million. Beeep. They're over the cap ceiling. And there's no backup goalie at \$600,000 in there.

It's a tricky situation for the Oilers.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.30.2012

647208 Edmonton Oilers

Are Oil Kings looking at Brandon's Michael Ferland?

Jim Matheson

When the Calgary Flames sent big truck winger Michael Ferland, who had 47 goals and 96 points last year in Brandon, back to his old junior club a few days ago, Western Hockey League GMs with Memorial Cup aspirations went on alert.

That includes the Edmonton Oil Kings, who made a significant trade for defenceman David Musil on Hallowe'en (three days after his Vancouver Giants were here), but need a larger body in their top 9. They have room for one more 20-year-old, which is what Ferland is. WHL teams are allowed three overage juniors and Dylan Wruck and T.J. Foster are the Oil Kings only 20-year-olds.

You can bet Oil Kings GM Bob Green, if he's in town on New Year's Eve, will be talking to Brandon's GM Kelly McCrimmon when the Oil Kings host the Wheat Kings at Rexall Place. It's nice timing for the Oil Kings to see Ferland–10 days before the WHL trade deadline—although they saw plenty of him last season, playing the Wheat Kings in round two of the playoffs.

The Wheat Kings are a long way from a Memorial Cup contender, with or without Ferland. They might not make the playoffs, so keeping Ferland, who had only played seven games with the Flames' AHL farm club in Abbotsford and three more in the ECHL, just to get in and go out quickly in the playoffs is hardly a priority unless they want the playoff gates. Moving him makes infinitely more sense for McCrimmon and it's no secret the Oil Kings and the Kamloops Blazers could use another forward.

What the Oil Kings would have to give up is the real story. The price for 20-year-olds, strictly rental players, isn't as high as dealing for a 19-year-old like Musil. But Ferland, even if he's finishing up his junior career, should still fetch a good prospect from a team and a solid bantam draft pick.

Ferland, who can score and also fight (31 in his WHL career), couldn't crack Abbotsford's AHL lineup on a regular basis. He asked permission to go back to junior in Brandon. This past summer, Ferland was charged with aggravated assault outside a bar in Cochrane when a person was punched and suffered a broken orbital bone.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.30.2012

647209 Los Angeles Kings

THE TOP SPORTS STORY LINES OF 2012: Kings finally have their long-awaited crown

Bob Keisser

Kings' players pose with the Stanley Cup after they beat the Devils 6-1 in Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final at Staples Center on June 11, 2012.

The Kings did not merely win the Stanley Cup.

Yes, they hoisted it around the ice at Staples Center after the Game 6 Finals win over New Jersey, and the Cup made its usual caravan to the homes, ancestral grounds and rinks of all the players and team officials, and its saucer certainly was filled with everything from scotch to egg nog.

What the Kings did was share it with the city and its long-suffering fans. If there's a Kings fan in greater Los Angeles who didn't plant a kiss or 200 on the Cup on its grand tour of the city, he or she wouldn't admit it for fear of humiliation.

This city has held parades for the Lakers in front of hundreds of thousands and has championship moments in Dodgers history - "in a year that has been so improbable, the impossible has happened" - ingrained in its brain forever.

But never has a group of unrequited fans been as ecstatic over a victory. This was Charlie Brown kicking the field goal and getting a kiss from the red-haired girl. It was pure, unadulterated bliss and not a single fan was too proud to wear the team's colors, paint his or her face or act like a 10-year-old when they actually got to cuddle with the Cup.

It's truly one of the most awesome moments in Los Angeles sports history, a kismet moment when a team that has won nothing turns it around so unexpectedly.

We could have expected it. Throughout the playoffs, the Kings were referenced as the last seed (eighth) in its conference, but the

truth was there were scant points separating the teams seeded three to eight. The team had played exceedingly well, too, since changing coaches early and hiring Darryl Sutter.

The Kings dominated the Cup like few NHL champions.

They ran off to a 3-0 lead against Vancouver in the first round and clinched in Game 5 in overtime. They swept St. Louis in the second round and allowed just six goals in four games.

They opened a 3-0 lead on Phoenix in the Conference final and then clinched in Game 5, again in overtime.

They opened a 3-0 lead on New Jersey before closing it out at home in Game 6, 6-1, barraging the Devils with three first-period goals which began a celebration that, frankly, hasn't ended in some places.

Goalie Jonathan Quick won the Conn Smythe Trophy as MVP of the Stanley Cup after allowing 30 goals in 20 playoff games. The Kings won three postseason games in overtime and were 10-1 on the road.

The only things the Kings didn't accomplish was no fault of their own; the NHL lockout has postponed the raising of the championship banner.

They were without question the biggest story of 2012.

2. Let's be frank, we're glad you're gone.

Frank McCourt did something more astonishing than the Kings: He bankrupted the Dodgers. He pocketed a lot of money in the process, of course, which is what all megalomaniac sports owners do.

His divorce proceedings with Jamie McCourt, a maniac in her own right, pulled the curtain back on the way he sliced and diced the Dodgers empire into shell pieces and took his profit while pushing the team into debt. MLB eventually had to force him out.

Not without a parting gift, a massive \$2.1 billion sale to the Guggenheim Group, one of your basic "investment" companies that had the benefit of Magic Johnson as a front man to ease tensions.

Frank-ly, there are as many reasons to distrust the new owners as the old. They've gone on a dubious

Steinbrenner-like trade and free-agent rampage - Adrian Gonzalez, Josh Beckett, Carl Crawford, Zack Grienke - that sent the payroll beyond \$200 million for 2013. If this team falls on its wallet, we'll all be reminded there's no guarantee the new owner is better than the old.

Who knows? Maybe Ryu Hyun-jin will be the new Fernando and the Dodgers will add Korean BBQ to the concession stands.

3. "And you thought the Kardashians were drama queens."

Congrats to Jim Buss. With McCourt and Mike Garrett gone and Donald Sterling's Clippers no longer a joke, you've become the biggest management goof in town. The Lakers always have been a soap opera, but never one so messy since Jerry Buss gave the keys to his son.

Mike Brown wasn't the right coach for this team, but dumping him after five games of season two? Courting Phil Jackson was smart; stiffing him was absurd. Truth is, this is an old team trying to win a quick title, and it remains to be seen if anyone beyond Dwight Howard can handle Mike D'Antoni's pace.

Right now, the Clippers are better, younger and more exciting.

4. "Not even No. 1 in Los Angeles."

One game never should define a coach, but USC's 2011 win over Oregon changed a lot of minds about Lane Kiffin. The publicity was good enough to make the Trojans the No. 1 team in the preseason AP poll and returning senior quarterback Matt Barkley a Heisman candidate.

Quicker than you can say deflated footballs, the Trojans lost to Stanford and went on a 1-4 bender to close the season, including a loss to UCLA for the first time since 2006. Kiffin was combative with the media, found novel ways to embarrass the program and did Barkley no favors with his sketchy game plans. The 2012 season ends in the Sun Bowl; as far as many USC fans are concerned it's sunset, not sunrise, on the Kiffin era.

5. "Big fish, fishy decisions."

On one hand, the Angels proved they have cornerstone, homegrown talents in A.L. Rookie of the Year Mike Trout and Long Beach State alum Jered Weaver, who took a home team discount signing a new contract and also pitched a no-hitter. On the other, they signed Albert Pujols when they needed bullpen help, and it was a second consecutive year of blown saves that ruined the team's postseason changes. Pujols can hit, and so can new signee Josh Hamilton. But Arte Moreno's moves of late seem more like

responses to what the Dodgers are doing than finding the right combination - all at the expense of manager Mike Scioscia.

6. "Eighteen years of freedom are at stake!"

Los Angeles has not been infested with the NFL since the Rams and Raiders left after the 1994 season, meaning no lousy teams or blackouts or oddball owners or, most importantly, a new stadium built at taxpayer expense. Alas, the L.A. City Council in 2012 approved a new downtown football stadium. The good politicians swear it won't cost anyone a penny.

Probably not, because like every other football fantasy floated in town this one still lacks all of the tithing the NFL requires, especially now with prime mover-shaker Philip Anschutz putting his company, AEG (Kings, Staples, Galaxy, a little of the Lakers), up for sale. Hey, every list needs a little pulp fiction

7. "Never redshirt a talented freshman."

There's one bit of advice Rick Neuheisel should have taken from Pete Carroll - play your freshmen, no matter how crowded a position may be. Neuheisel chose to redshirt quarterback Brett Hundley in 2011; the team won a division title but lost 50-0 to USC, finished 6-8 and Neuheisel lost his job. Neuheisel's loss was new coach Jim Mora's gain.

Hundley was the key to a Bruins revival that produced a 9-4 record, Pac-12 South title, all-time rushing title for Johnathan Franklin and Holiday Bowl date. There's no denying the Bruins regained some swagger with the change; now the question is what Mora can do for an encore and how long before he wants to return to the NFL.

8. "Olympic royalty in London."

It's a given that Southern California will reap a large portion of medals for America at every Olympics and 2012 was no different, with three local women taking home a trio of medals - Allyson Felix (three golds), Carmelita Jeter (gold, silver, bronze) and Rebecca Soni (two gold, silver). The gold-medal winning men's and women's basketball teams, women's soccer and women's water polo teams were SoCal strong, too; Long Beach State's Misty May-Treanor won a third gold medal with partner Kerri Walsh-Jennings in beach volleyball; Monrovia sharpshooter Kim Rhode became the first American to medal in five consecutive games and Bryshon Nellum, four years removed from gunshot wounds that threatened to end his career, won a relay medal and carried the American flag in the closing ceremonies.

9. "OK, so maybe this sport is catching on."

It will be eons before American professional soccer can consider itself on par with the best leagues in Europe and South America, but give the MLS credit for survival and, specifically, the Galaxy for taking a costly chance on David Beckham and winning a second consecutive MLS Cup. It ain't Stanley, but it will do for soccer fans.

Beckham and wife Posh now return to the homeland, where they undoubtedly will push the royal pregnancy off the front page.

10. "Oh me oh my! BINGO!!"

At last, vindication for Ralph Lawler. The long-suffering Clippers announcer now has a team worthy of his enthusiasm and hopes. The Clips took a major step in 2011-12 by going 40-26 and reaching the conference semifinals, and might have gone farther if Chauncey Billups hadn't been hurt. In Blake Griffin and Chris Paul, the Clips have two thoroughbreds, and they're currently on a franchise-record 16-game winning streak. If the Kings can win a Stanley Cup, the Clippers can dream just as big.

Also receiving votes:

UCLA men's basketball: Ben Howland lands star-studded recruiting class, begins season in Top 25, then loses to Cal Poly and two players quit. On a good note, a John Wooden statue is unveiled and a new Pauley Pavilion opens.

Antron Brown: The driver becomes the first African-American to win a major U.S. auto racing title at the Automobile Club of Southern California NHRA Finals in Pomona.

Jamie Bestwick and Bob Burnquist: Skateboarder extraordinaire Bestwick six-peats in the Vert at the X Games to tie a record while Burnquist, competing in his 18 th and perhaps final Games, defeats teen rivals for Skateboard Air title.

Ryan Hunter-Reay: The determined IndyCar driver won the series title by a slender margin over Will Power in the season finale by surviving multiple

incidents over a 500-mile night race at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana. Power won the Long Beach Grand Prix earlier in the season. Also in racing, the IndyCar season ended with its CEO being flushed and Irwindale Speedway filed for bankruptcy and has yet to reopen.

Code of Conduct: L.A. sports teams announce code of conduct for fans.

We're sure Bryan Stow will be pleased to know this.

Breeders' Cup: Horse Racing's best weekend, which is becoming more relevant than the Triple Crown among serious horsemen, returned to Santa Anita in 2012 with Fort Larned taking the Classic (in which favored Game On Dude was seventh).

Sam Querrey: Thousand Oaks tennis star wins the Farmers Classic for third time in four years but L.A. loses the last ATP event, with roots in town dating back to 1927.

Graeme McDowell: Golfer wins Tiger Woods' World Challenge for the second time in three years at Sherwood Country Club. Maybe it's time to rename it the Graeme McDowell World Challenge.

Also, John Huh of Crescenta Valley was named the PGA Tour's Rookie of the Year.

LA Daily News: LOADED: 12.30.2012

647210 Los Angeles Kings

THERE USED TO BE AN ARENA - THE SPECTRUM-PHILADELPHIA

Bob Miller

Not many NHL players on opposing teams enjoyed playing in the Spectrum, which was one of the most intimidating venues in the NHL. It was located on Broad Street in the South Philadelphia Sports Complex, and was the home of the Philadelphia Flyers, known in the early 1970s as the "Broad Street Bullies," because of their belligerent and physical style of play. When visiting players, for whatever reason, couldn't play in a game there, they were accused of having the "Philadelphia Flu," a fictitious illness.

The Spectrum opened in the fall of 1967 after taking only 11 months to build at a cost of \$12 million, or in 2012 dollars, \$83.6 million. It was Philadelphia's first modern indoor sports arena and opening night concession prices featured a hot dog for 35 cents, a roast beef sandwich for 75 cents, an eight ounce soft drink for 15 cents and a 12 ounce soft drink for 25 cents. A regular beer cost 10 cents and a premium beer 40 cents.

The Flyers first-ever home game in the Spectrum featured a 1-0 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins. The LA Kings first-ever game in the arena was on November 26, 1967, a 7-2 loss to the Flyers, as Terry Gray and Real Lemieux scored Kings' goals. Wayne Rutledge played 31 minutes in goal and allowed five goals, and Terry Sawchuck played 29 minutes and allowed the final two goals.

My first Kings broadcast in the Spectrum was on November 8, 1973, a 3-2 Kings victory. The Kings scored in each period on goals by Mike Corrigan, Butch Goring and Whitey Widing. Gary Edwards stopped 33 of 35 Flyers shots. The Kings did not win a lot of games in the Spectrum, but one memorable victory took place on opening night, October 10, 1974. The Flyers had become the first of the 1967 expansion teams to win the Stanley Cup the previous season. They planned a huge celebration for that opening night, complete with the Stanley Cup, raising the championship banner, and their "good luck" charm, famous singer Kate Smith, was there in person to sing "God Bless America." The Kings spoiled the festivities, beating the Flyers, 5-3, on goals by Mike Corrigan, Bob Murdoch, Dan Maloney and two by Tommy Williams. Gary Edwards was the winning Kings goalie facing 37 Flyers shots.

There were several wild occurrences at the Spectrum in games between the Kings and Flyers. When the press box and broadcast location was in the lower bowl, fans would pass by writers and broadcasters on the way to their seats. Every time the Kings played there, an elderly gentleman would stop in front of me with a puppet dressed in a Flyers uniform and say in his German accent, 'Dis is vat Schultz vill do to de Kings tonight,' and he would pull a string and the Flyers puppet would throw punches at another puppet dressed in a Kings uniform.

That is exactly what happened on the night of March 11, 1979. In the first period of that game, 372 penalty minutes were handed out and 10 players were ejected from the game. Kings players ejected were: Randy Holt, Mark Heaslip, Steve Jensen, Dave Taylor and Bert Wilson. My biggest memory of that brawl was the Flyers Ken "The Rat" Linseman, skating around players who were paired off fighting. He was trying to trip Kings' players with his stick. He had an appropriate nickname. At the time that game set NHL records in nine penalty categories. Holt of the Kings still has the NHL individual record for most penalties in one period-9; most penalty minutes in one period-67; and most penalty minutes in one game-67. The Flyers won the game, 6-3, giving them a record of 15-0-4 in the last 19 games vs. the Kings.

Weather has been a factor in Spectrum history. On March 1, 1968, wind blew part of the covering off the roof, forcing the closure of the building for one month. The Flyers hurriedly moved their next "home game" to Madison Square Garden in New York, then played a "home game" in Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, and finished the remainder of their "home schedule" in the Coliseum in Quebec City, home of their top minor league team. They were able to return to the Spectrum for their first playoff game that season against the St. Louis Blues on April 4, 1968.

Mother Nature showed her wrath again on March 13, 1993, when the Kings played at the Spectrum. During the first period, a storm dubbed "The Storm of the Century," with 50 mph winds and 12 inches of snow, hit the East Coast. The winds shattered a sizeable pane of glass on the concourse, and the building was deemed unsafe. The game was suspended at the end of the period, with the score tied 1-1. The game was postponed until April 1, and played from the start with the Kings winning 3-1 on goals by Luc Robitaille, Rob Blake and Darryl Sydor.

Weather and poor scheduling also played a part in a Kings game at the Spectrum on January 7, 1979. The night before, the Kings played in Pittsburgh, and the next day they flew to Philadelphia. Due to ice and snow, the Kings plane couldn't land in Philly, and was diverted to Kennedy airport in New York, all of this on a game day. The Kings scrambled to charter a bus to Philadelphia and went right to the arena, arriving at 5:20 p.m. for a 7 p.m. game. We were live on television at 7 p.m. for the start of the game, when it was announced the game wouldn't start until 7:30 p.m. The ice wasn't ready, due to a gymnastics event at the arena earlier in the day, so we had an impromptu 30 minutes to fill.

My partner at the time, Pete Weber, and I filled the half hour with comments, and interviews. At one point while I was "on camera," I noticed something in my peripheral vision, but I didn't look away. When we went to a commercial break, Pete said to me, 'Did you see the size of that rat running along the TV cable?' Luckily I hadn't. The late arrival and the delay in starting the game didn't help the Kings as they lost 3-0, with Flyers goalie Bernie Parent getting his 55th career shutout.

Kings Head Coach Bob Pulford got into trouble at the Spectrum on October 10, 1976. During another fight filled game, a bench-clearing brawl broke out in the first period. During the fight, an incensed Pulford grabbed the jersey of linesman John Brown and shook him. Realizing he was in trouble, Pulford started smoothing out Brown's shirt. Pulford was ejected and fined the "exorbitant" amount of \$350. The Kings had no assistant coaches in those days, so General Manger Jake Milford coached the remainder of the game, which was won by the Flyers, 1-0.

In later years, the broadcast location was moved to the third level of the building and the only bathroom facilities were on the first floor, open to the public, and no elevator. On November 3, 1985, with eight minutes left in the game, I was in trouble as nature was calling and I knew I couldn't wait until the end of the game, nor could I make it downstairs to the public bathroom. So, just as many announcers have done so during their careers, I was forced to use empty soft drink cups to rescue me.

The Flyers won back to back Stanley Cups in 1974 and 1975, and on January 11, 1976, during the height of the "Cold War," they became the first NHL team to defeat the vaunted Central Red Army team of the Soviet Union by a score of 4-1 in Philadelphia.

The Flyers truly enjoyed a "home ice" advantage in the Spectrum as they still hold the NHL record for the longest undefeated streak in one season, 35 games in 1979-80 with 25 wins and 10 ties. Many of those wins were achieved in front of the boisterous home crowd.

The Flyers played their final game in the Spectrum in Game 5 of the 1996 Eastern Conference Semifinals, losing to the Florida Panthers in overtime. The Flyers then moved into their new home – then called the Wells Fargo Center – for the 1996-97 season.

The Flyers minor league team, the Phantoms, then played at the Spectrum until the building was demolished, starting in November of 2010. A "wrecking ball ceremony" was held with Flyers greats, including Hall of Famers Bobby Clarke and Bernie Parent, in attendance. The demolition was completed in May of 2011 without the use of explosives.

I'm sure no opposing player shed a tear over the demolition.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 12.30.2012

647211 Los Angeles Kings

Andy Murray (Part 2)...IIHF Hall-of-Fame!

Jim Fox

Earlier this year (May 20th in Helsinki, Finland) Andy was inducted into the IIHF Hall-of-Fame (Class of 2012)...he talks about some of his experiences with Team Canada...

JF: Earlier this year you were inducted into the International Ice Hockey Hall of Fame. When you think back—when you think about the whole international hockey competition aspect, what comes to mind?

Andy Murray: There isn't one event or one thing that I can say was better than the other–I was fortunate enough to win six Spengler Cups...

...and three World Championships be in the Olympics but to me there are two things and I'll always remember. Number 1—The players and coaches are all on the ice and everybody lines up on the blue line after they've given you the medals and you stand across the blue line and they play your anthem and it's pretty special. I always took a few steps back and looked at the line of the players, the assistants and everybody celebrating and you just look at that and think, that's pretty special—you hear your anthem playing and seeing a whole bunch of Canadians on the ice celebrating. The other thing is I took my cell phone and from the ice I called my mom at home—actually after each event and I know that meant a lot to her and it was special for me too—those are the two things that stick out in my mind, watching everybody celebrate and then calling her.

JF: Until I did a little research, I wasn't aware—other than Russian coaches (Arkady Chernyshev/Anatoli Tarasov/Boris Kulagin/TiktorTikhonov)...

...no other coach has ever coached three World Champions and as was pointed out in the article that I read—usually the Russian team was intact for many years in a row and didn't really change but you were able to bring three "different" teams (1997, 2003, 2007) together quickly. What do you have to do bring them together so quickly and no disrespect to anyone, you have to pick from players that don't make the NHL playoffs?

Andy Murray: You have to have a GM that picks good players (Laughs). You've got guys that say no to you as well, for whatever reason. I just always felt—I never gave a thought that we weren't going to win, I mean it was just, you're Canadian and you go to a international tournament and you're supposed to win it and I think it's pretty unique because—and we were talking about amateurs earlier, but these guys are all pros and I'll tell you, as soon as they put that jersey on and practice and you've got them together for the whole time—you do a lot of team building and it's five or six weeks and guys have given five or six weeks of their lives up to go and play for their country. I mean, if you're going to do that, you should plan to win it—that's why, to me, the best things in those jobs is when you call the player, you call a Jarome Iginla or a Joe Sakic or Rob Blake...

...and they said 'yeah coach I'd love to be there I'll be there', that was the best thing, because you knew right away what those guys were giving up and you don't get paid for it, we didn't get paid for those things and you go because it's the right thing to do and to me it was just that rallying cry that you hear and you should win it—we're here, we're going to spend this time together, let's win this and everything we do and everything we did involved team building—from the way you handed out team Canada shirts, it was all part of team building. Rather than giving them everything at once we put one t-shirt in their stall after practice, you know what guys are like, they come in they get a free t-shirt, it doesn't matter if they make 10 million dollars, all of a sudden if they didn't get their free t-shirt they're looking for it—we had a plan for team building from the day we got together and all the way through the things we did on a daily basis. I know the last team I was with it was "digging in or Canada!" We went to the war archives in Ottawa and we got film—we called it "trench warfare" hockey. We were going to

Russia that year, that last year and the Russians had Ovechkin and Malkin...

...and everybody and that's when we had a young team, the last one in 2007 and we knew we were going to have to dig in and battle so we called it "trench warfare hockey" and we showed them clips from the World War I, where the Canadians would go out in the trenches and then you get stopped and then you dig in and push back but you dig in again and you move forward again. We try to have a theme for every one of the world championships that we're at, the last one was kind of "digging in for Canada" because we hadn't won one for a while internationally we needed to do something and we were trying to get a better placing so that Canada could get a better seed at the Olympics and that was important—so to me it's just bottom line, when you are putting on that Canadian jersey and you do everything you can to make sure that happens. Everything's team building it's pulling together—you know your practices have to be well designed so that there's energy but you're setting up a structure that they can deal with in very quick order.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 12.30.2012

647212 Minnesota Wild

Gophers vs. Air Force line chart; BC's York sets NCAA wins record; NHL/NHLPA CBA update

Michael Russo

Legendary Boston College coach Jerry York, an NCAA head coach since 1972, became the winningest hockey coach in NCAA history this evening. The Eagles beat Alabama-Huntsville 5-2 in the first game of the Mariucci Classic.

It was York's 925th victory, passing Ron Mason for first all-time.

"Coaches coach. We play to win trophies. Despite all the hoopla, it never really entered my mind," York said. "We always talk in our program, there's no personal goals. We're not trying to become Hobey Baker [winners] and All-Americans.

"Golfers, they want to win a Masters. ... It's not what we're about with the Eagles. I've always been about the team. I haven't really sought individual goals."

York won 125 games at Clarkson, 342 at Bowling Green and now 458 in 19 seasons at Boston College. He has won five national championships – four at Boston College – and guided the Eagles to 10 Frozen Four berths since 1998

In 1968, BC coach Bernie Burke handed York, then a graduate assistant, a whistle and said "run practice."

"I kind of liked it," York said. "I never had a whistle, you know?"

How much longer will he coach?

"I feel good, I feel healthy, I enjoy what I do," York said. "As long as BC feels I've done a good job, I'll keep on moving."

The Gophers, who have won 12 of 21 Mariucci Classics, play BC, the No. 1 team in the nation and defending national champs, Sunday at 7. Here is the advance from today's paper. York said tonight senior defenseman Patch Alber may miss the rest of this season. The doctor here believes he tore his meniscus playing pregame soccer tonight. Also, leading scorer Johnny Gaudreau is at world juniors and defenseman Isaac MacLeod is likely out with a shoulder injury.

They host Air Force tonight.

Here is the line chart for both teams:

Minnesota

Forwards

Kyle Rau-Nick Bjugstad-Nate Condon

Sam Warning-Erik Haula-Zach Budish

Tom Serratore-Travis Boyd-Seth Ambroz

Ryan Reilly-Christian Isackson-Justin Holl

Defensemen

Seth Helgeson-Mark Alt

Jake Parenteau-Ben Marshall

Brady Skjei-Nate Schmidt

Goalies

Adam Wilcox

Mike Shibrowski

Ryan Coyne

Air Force

Forwards

Tony Thomas-Chad Demers-John Kruse

Kyle De Laurell-Stephen Carew-Cole Gunner

Scott Holm-Ben Carey-Casey Kleisinger

Ryan Timar-Jason Fabian-Mitch Torrel

Defensemen

Alex Halloran-Dan Weissenhofer

Eric Artman-Mike McDonald

Trevor Waldoch-Mike Walsh

Goalies

Jason Torf

David Bosner

Paul Moberg

As for NHL and NHLPA talks toward a new collective bargaining agreement, there were a series of conference calls between the two sides today.

I am told by sources that they went line by line through the NHL proposal from Thursday (see story here) and they will talk again Sunday, likely face to face, with bargaining potentially going to re-start formally Sunday or Monday.

Remember, an agreement must be struck by Jan. 11 in order for training camp to start Jan. 12 and a 48-game season to begin Jan. 19. That means the Wild's home opener could fall on Hockey Day Minnesota.

By the way, one big reason why the league would love to start Jan. 19 is NBC's first telecast is supposed to be set for Jan. 20.

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.30.2012 647213 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout update: NHL, NHLPA talks could continue Sunday

Charles Curtis

Most hockey fans probably don't want to hear there was a whole lot of talking done between the NHL and NHLPA today and not much beyond it. But the process to end the lockout and begin an abbreviated season is going to be one that takes time -- especially when reports say the latest offer from the NHL is nearly 300 pages long.

Thus far, the only news from today's conference call between the two sides was that they ended earlier today. The Associated Press' Ira Podell reported the "informational" discussions could turn into meetings "for

traditional negotiating on Sunday in New York, but that hadn't been scheduled as of Saturday afternoon."

Sportsnet's John Shannon, however, tweeted that there will indeed be meetings of some sort tomorrow, "whether informational or actual negotiations [that] will be face-to-face" in New York City. He later clarified to say Sunday "will start with information calls which may include some face to face, but no actual bargaining meetings are set yet."

There's also news from Puck Daddy's Greg Wyshynski: NHL VP for Arena & Event Operations Dan O'Neill sent a memo to various arena workers regarding "information about technical changes implemented for 'the upcoming season'." It's the first time, Wyshynski reported, that a missive like this one has been sent to that group of workers.

We've heard good signs like this before, so as we've been saying ad nauseum, a deal has to be struck first for any optimism to turn into an actual season -- as The Star-Ledger's Rich Chere asked, "Is the NHL's new proposal to the players a breakthrough towards a collective bargaining agreement and a return to the ice, or is it just another tease?" We don't know yet.

Here's what we do know: there's a hint of momentum as the two sides will likely speak again tomorrow.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.30.2012 647214 New Jersey Devils

NHL's CBA proposal: Is it a breakthrough or another tease?

Rich Chere

Is the NHL's new proposal to the players a breakthrough towards a collective bargaining agreement and a return to the ice, or is it just another tease?

That is what the union is trying to determine today as it holds conference calls to educate players on the 300-page proposal submitted to the NHLPA on Thursday. It is likely that negotiations between league and union leaders will be held tomorrow in New York if the PA's executive board feels the proposal has offered enough concessions.

At this point, there was a mixture of optimism and caution among a handful of players with a basic knowledge of the league's proposal. Almost all feel there is still some give-and-take necessary.

Although the league's \$300 million "make whole" provision to compensate players remained on the table, the union would like to see it raised to \$325 million or so. It is doubtful that the owners are willing to give much, if any, more in this area.

The owners also raised contract limits from five years to six (seven years for signing a team's own players. The union may try to get another year or two, but that issue probably would not hold up an agreement.

Owners seek a \$60 million salary cap for the 2013-14 season with one compliance buyout that would not count against the cap. It's an area in which the union might seek a little more, such as a \$65-68 million cap.

Some of the minor points of the league's proposal include player "working condition" improvements such as: Ice-time restrictions and mandatory "days off" requirements during training camp; club practice schedule and "days off" requirements during the regular season; an extended "Christmas Break" (Dec. 24-26); mandatory facility standards for visiting teams relating to training/medical supplies, workout equipment and dressing room standards/supplies; and players provided access to NHL.com platform for their individual player websites and social media.

Other points: Implementation of a weighted entry draft lottery in which all non-playoff teams compete for an opportunity to choose first overall in the annual draft; exclusive negotiating rights window for European draftees extended to one period covering four years, instead of two periods covering two years each; modification to "Four-recall Rule" to remove limitation on the number of transactions following the trade deadline; replace with limitations on the total number of Recalls on roster at any one time after the trade deadline.

Also: Updated and improved grievance arbitration process and procedure; enhanced access to game tickets for visiting team players and the NHLPA; NHLPA representatives to be provided reasonable access to club facilities and players at reasonable times; new player discipline procedures and protocol incorporating player appeal rights to a neutral third-party arbitrator for both on-ice and off-ice discipline.

If negotiations can resume tomorrow, the league is hopeful of reaching a settlement on a new CBA by next weekend and beginning a shortened season on Jan. 19 at the latest.

Star Ledger LOADED: 12.30.2012

647215 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout that's putting Winter Classic on ice is costing more than just one game

Pat Leonard

Unfortunately for hockey fans, even if the league and players' union salvage a 48-game season in the next two weeks, it won't include the Red Wings hosting the Maple Leafs at Michigan Stadium.

NBC intended to air the NHL Winter Classic on New Year's Day at 1 p.m. Instead, New Yorkers will see the soap opera "Days of Our Lives."

That title could describe the NHL lockout — bad acting, predictable plot lines, fans still tune in the next week — but even worse, it is a sobering reminder that hockey has lost its signature event for 2013.

Even if the league and players' union salvage a 48-game season in the next two weeks, that season will not include the Detroit Red Wings hosting the Toronto Maple Leafs in the open air of Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor, Mich.

That may not upset WFAN sports radio personality Mike Francesa, who memorably told Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist that he hadn't seen the Blueshirts' 3-2 win over the Philadelphia Flyers in last season's Classic because he had been watching football instead. But the cancellation has had a ripple effect.

The NHL also had to cancel the Hockeytown Winter Festival in Detroit in the weeks preceding the big game, a series of events scheduled to include college, AHL, OHL, high school and youth hockey games at Comerica Park, home of Major League Baseball's Detroit Tigers. That's one reason the league made the announcement on Nov. 2 — crews needed to construct outdoor rinks, and schools had been planning for this special opportunity since the spring.

The rival high school programs of Cadillac and Big Rapids, for example, faced off in their annual 131 Challenge Cup the day before Thanksgiving, with Cadillac prevailing, 3-1. They had been geared up for an outdoor rematch three hours south under the lights.

"There was a lot of buildup going on through the spring and the summer and into the fall," said Scott Graham, the 16th-year coach of the Cadillac Vikings. "The Cadillac-Big Rapids rivalry has intensified over the last 10 years, so trying to take that rivalry downstate and participate in an event that basically would be a lifetime opportunity for these kids and the communities and the schools — all involved — was something special and unique. When the opportunity came up, neither side hesitated, so naturally there is going to be some disappointment."

No one lost more on these clubs than the seniors. While the NHL promised to keep the next Winter Classic and Festival in Detroit and Ann Arbor — and Cadillac and Big Rapids still have a seat at that table — their 15 combined seniors will not be around to suit up.

"It's nice they locked us in for next year, but we actually had 10 seniors this year, so for those kids, you kind of feel the worst," Big Rapids coach Tim Blashill said. "It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. . . . We had a few different fund-raisers in the summer and we're just going to try to move that money that we did make to next year. And our seniors worked for it, too — that's the other part of it. We did a couple team things, so that was tough on them, as well."

It all made the Red Wings' response to the unfortunate situation that much more impressive, and left Graham, Blashill, their clubs and communities eternally grateful.

In lieu of playing at Comerica Park, the organization extended invites to all 16 high schools to play at Joe Louis Arena instead. Eight teams took the Wings up on their offer, including Cadillac and Big Rapids. The Vikings and their fans brought a couple charter buses down, the Big Rapids Cardinals and their community stayed involved, and Cadillac beat Big Rapids, 4-0, on Dec. 19 in a different once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"The silver lining was being able to play down at Joe Louis," Graham said. "In fact, one of my players said, 'This is the first time I've ever been at Joe Louis Arena,' and he's a senior, an 18-year-old kid."

"I give the Red Wings credit," said Blashill, whose brother, Jeff, was a Wings assistant last season and now is the head coach their AHL affiliate, the Grand Rapids Griffins. "They did a great job, allowed us to go through the locker room and had some different things we could do down there, as well. That softened the blow for sure, and they didn't have to do that. We really appreciated that."

That's one feel-good story in this lockout, at least.

But then there's the economic impact. Previous Winter Classics reportedly have generated spinoff revenue between \$22 million to \$36 million. That revenue is out the window for this New Year's Day. Bridgestone and SiriusXM lost key visibility as the sponsors of the Winter Classic and Festival, respectively, that they cannot get back.

HBO, which annually chronicles the Winter Classic opponents on its "24/7" reality series, lost a full season of one of its most recognizable and popular sports programs. The hope and expectation is that the show will bounce back just as HBO's "Hard Knocks" NFL franchise did in 2012, raking in its second-highest audience level in its history with the Miami Dolphins after the 2011 NFL lockout wiped out the previous season.

Add these factors to the mess of labor negotiations and it's all a soap opera, just like "Days of Our Lives," which on New Year's Day will deliver this plot line, according to the TV guide: "Relationships grow and die in the town of Salem."

Just like the NHL. Just a different town.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.30.2012

647216 New Jersey Devils

NHL sends revised proposal to players' union

Pat Leonard

A deal must be agreed upon in the next two weeks in order to fill these arenas this season.

The NHL quietly sent a revised, 300-page collective bargaining proposal to its players' union late Thursday afternoon and made clear that hockey must begin by Jan. 19 to save the 2012-13 season.

The league named Jan. 12 as the latest date training camps could open, the Daily News has confirmed, meaning the meat of any deal must be agreed upon in the next two weeks. The NHL would like to open camp earlier — which partially explains why it moved on several issues in Thursday's proposal — but at the very least, it wants to start by Jan. 19 in order to fit in a 48-game regular season.

The NHL also played a 48-game schedule during the lockout-shortened 1994-95 season that followed the Rangers' Stanley Cup victory. Right now, all games through Jan. 14 already are canceled, including the Winter Classic. The All-Star Game also is off the board.

"We are hopeful that once the union's staff and negotiating committee have had an opportunity to thoroughly review and consider our new proposal, they will share it with the players," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said in a statement released Friday afternoon (no NHL quote is complete these days without a shot at union boss Don Fehr). "We want to be back on the ice as soon as possible."

HockeyBuzz.com first reported the NHL's belated Christmas present early Friday morning, on Day 104 of the NHL lockout. The players' union plans to respond but required more time to review the detailed 300-page document.

"We're still looking it over," one player said.

This will make for an interesting few days, since the union's executive board has until Wednesday to file for disclaimer interest and disband the union to file anti-trust lawsuits against the league. The players likely will want to respond before Wednesday so they could still use the threat of disclaimer as leverage in the event the league scoffs at a counteroffer. After Wednesday, they still could disband but would require another vote of the membership to authorize its board to do so, which would eat up precious time.

The union is not expected to accept the NHL's proposal outright, but the membership will see that the league has moved on several issues: Instead of capping player contract lengths at five years, the league has backed off slightly to six years while allowing players to re-sign with their own teams for seven years. Maximum variability of a player's year-to-year salary increased from 5% to 10% and the \$300 million make-whole offer to offset player losses is still on the table.

Most significantly, the NHL is conceding one compliance buyout per team of any player contract before the start of the 2013-14 season. A compliance buyout allows teams to buy out a player's contract without incurring the contract's hit on the salary cap (think the Rangers and Wade Redden). This would help teams fit under a proposed adjusted salary cap of \$60 million for the 2013-14 season, but according to an ESPN report, each buyout would be charged against the players' 50% share of league revenue, rather than occurring outside of the system, as preferred by the players.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.30.2012

647217 New Jersey Devils

Time's come for No Honor League

LARRY BROOKS

Look, everyone needs to understand that it's all within context. NHL players could have their pay slashed by 50 percent and lead marvelous lives. We get that.

But at the same time there isn't an owner extant who had the slightest need to take so much as an additional nickel out of the pocket of a single player in order to live their own lives of luxury and yet that didn't stop the No Honor League from conducting this disgraceful dance of power, ego and greed that has played across the landscape for the last six months.

Owners' Lockout III appears on its way to a resolution. The 2012-13 season seems likely to commence no later than Jan. 19. That is, if negotiations between the NHL and NHLPA don't break down over the next week and the framework of the collective bargaining agreement on the table is adopted, as it must

DEAL TIME? While the NHL may be headed toward ending the lockout, problems still lie ahead for the league and commissioner Gary Bettman.

For what the players — who have fought the good fight every step of the way — must weigh is whether a deal that better serves the rank-and-file will be available in the ashes of a canceled season and whether players whose NHL windows are closing could possibly recoup the losses that would accompany cancellation.

It's time, for the first time, for these players to be selfish and put themselves first, ahead of the generation that will follow. Some locked out three times, many more locked out twice, these world-class athletes have paid enough of a price.

This is going to be a bad deal (again, all within context) for the players, a very bad deal for players whose contracts expire at the end of this season, and a worse deal for the fans in big markets who pay the freight for their small-market cousins, but whose teams will be limited by a tightening cap and the NHL's commitment to genetic engineering.

It's going to be a deal that enriches big-market owners exponentially, puts money in the bank accounts of the small-marketers too, but ultimately will fail to solve the league's problems because the entire percentage-of-the-

gross concept by which Canceler-in-Chief Gary Bettman lives is a fraudulent one applied to a confederation in which little money is shared among franchises of widely disparate value.

Small markets that cannot produce sufficient revenue will still fail. Mismanaged teams will still fail. No amount of scheming on Sixth Avenue meant to redistribute personnel wealth around the league will succeed in transforming losing operations into winners or loony owners into intelligent ones.

Over the first seven years of the hard cap era under which teams were allowed to maneuver with dramatic front-loading, 19 of the NHL's 30 teams advanced as far as the conference finals. In the last seven years of the uncapped era under which teams operated without legislated constraint, 17 of 30 clubs made it to the conference finals.

That is hardly a dramatic difference. As such, the web of enhanced restrictions within what will become the new law of the NHL land is not likely to produce a dramatic competitive difference, either. Whether operating in big markets or small, foolish people will still make foolish decisions.

Success in the NHL has, is and always will be predominantly determined by front-office acumen; by scouting, player development, coaching, and commitment to excellence accompanied by constructing and maintaining team identity.

The focus for the NHLPA in the face-to-face negotiations that are expected to begin here today or tomorrow should and must be on 2013-14. The union's need in this regard is consistent with the needs of teams (even with one amnesty buyout) that will be pressed up against the NHL's proposed \$60 million cap for next year that represents an immediate decrease of 14.53 percent unheard of in the history of hard-cap pro sports.

Such a decrease represents a triple threat in the form of guaranteed double-digit escrow losses plus limited options for free agents and cap teams alike. The Rangers wouldn't be anywhere close to being in the most difficult shape in the NHL, but Group II's Ryan McDonagh, Derek Stepan and Carl Hagelin, all coming off Entry Level, would be boxed into one-year bridge deals awaiting arbitration, with eventual deals perhaps costing the Blueshirts more in the long run against the cap, and this with a potential 2014-15 offseason disaster looming. Lose/lose.

The NHL has no right to engineer a transition in which teams that have invested in building winners under the rules of the expired CBA are systematically stripped of their assets and thereby punishes those franchises' season subscribers who essentially fund the league and have funded the lockout.

The cap must be at least \$65 million next season to prevent Sixth Avenue from rigging the system. The floor could remain at the proposed \$44 million. There is precedent for deviating from the \$16 million cap/floor band, for in Year One of the expired CBA, the cap was \$39 million while the floor was \$21.5 million.

An increased cap, though, would mean greater escrow. The NHLPA's charge is to negotiate a cap on escrow for next season, even if it is as high as what likely appears an unpalatable 10 percent.

Next year should be what this next week is about. Once that is settled, this year can begin.

New York Post LOADED: 12.30.2012

647218 Philadelphia Flyers

NEW OFFER FROM OWNERS

Staff Writer

Since the doors were chained shut to NHL locker rooms and arenas on Sept. 15, the same sentiment has been echoed from players around the league: "We want to play."

The players have said it. On Friday, the owners showed it.

Fearing the cancellation of a second season in 8 years because of labor unrest, and the very real possibility of franchise values dropping by 25 percent or more, and hockey falling further out of the U.S. sporting landscape, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman emailed the NHL Players'

Association a hefty, 300-page proposal for a new collective-bargaining agreement.

Friday's proposal presented numerous meaningful concessions on behalf of owners to try and salvage a season.

The ball is clearly now in the players' court. The only problem is that no one knows exactly how NHLPA executive Donald Fehr will handle this nuclear football. Having watched Fehr fight for the last 4 months, we have a pretty good idea how it might all play out.

In short: Don't hold your breath. The end is not imminent. But Friday was the beginning of the endgame.

The NHLPA held an executive board and negotiating committee conference call on Friday, with Flyers players Braydon Coburn and Scott Hartnell participating, to mull the latest details. The sides are expected to speak Saturday, with a likely face-to-face meeting on Sunday's agenda in New York City.

Saturday is the 105th day of this lockout. More than 50 percent of the season's schedule already has been whacked.

Still, if you are Fehr, there's no real reason to rush back to the bargaining table.

Since long before the NHLPA more or less walked out on a possible deal on Dec. 6 in New York, scripted with Tony Award-deserving choreography, Fehr has been advising his players to hold out for better terms. It has been working. Slowly, but surely, the NHL has been inching toward the players.

Consider: The three remaining sticking points on a deal on Dec. 6 were length of the CBA, term limits on player contracts, and salary variance on player contracts to squash back-diving and front-loaded deals. The NHL moved significantly on all fronts on Friday - increasing player contract-term limits, allowing for opt-out clauses on the CBA term and salary variance percentages.

The "make whole" money, which was supposedly off the table, remains at \$300 million - up from nothing in early November to \$211 million on Nov. 21. Other contracting issues that previously were sticking points - such as entry-level deals, arbitration rights and unrestricted free-agent rights, which to owners were seeking to limit - will remain unchanged from the previous CBA.

For the first time in this process, the NHL officially laid out a drop-dead date with its proposal, according to the Canadian Press. This offer is contingent upon an agreement on Jan. 11, starting training camp the next day, and opening a 48-game season on Jan. 19.

Let's not forget that Fehr still has the option of playing the "disclaimer of interest" card in federal court by Tuesday, which would dissolve the union and force litigation. In many ways, the timing of Friday's latest proposal is not surprising, as the league is trying to prevent a courtroom battle that it believes will blow up the season.

Fehr's job was to prevent the players from getting annihilated in bargaining. He's already accomplished that - and then some. It is my belief that his players are as antsy - or possibly more so - than the owners, who are clearly pressuring Bettman to play a season at all costs. The entire sport, as observers on both sides are quickly recognizing, could be wiped off the map completely with another iced season.

Games already are canceled through Jan. 14. By my watch, that means Fehr still has about 2 weeks to milk the owners.

The deal might or might not get any better this time around, but he certainly will keep trying.

Slap shots

Danny Briere signed a contract extension with the Berlin Polar Bears, of the German Eishockey League, on Thursday. Briere, who has posted 33 points in 20 games, signed for the remainder of the season, but still maintains an opt-out clause to return to the U.S. if a new CBA is brokered in the NHL . . . Claude Giroux, who returned from Berlin to Ottawa to nurse a neck injury, remains in Canada. Giroux is hoping for labor peace before setting a new course of action . . . Of the Flyers who originally started the season in Europe, only Jake Voracek, Ilya Bryzgalov, Ruslan Fedotenko and Briere remain overseas. Wayne Simmonds, Matt Read and Giroux have returned home. Max Talbot and Bruno Gervais are skating in the 84th annual Spengler Cup tournament in Davos, Switzerland, before returning to their European teams.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.30.2012

647219 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers' Danny Briere injures wrist in Germany

Sam Carchidi

Veteran Flyers center Danny Briere will miss two weeks because of a wrist injury suffered in Germany, according to a report from Eishockeynews.de.

That means Briere should be ready if the NHL and players' union solve their labor dispute and start the season Jan. 19.

Briere, 35, who had 16 goals in 70 games with the Flyers last season, is playing for Eisbaren Berlin and has 10 goals and 34 points in 21 games. In Germany Briere teamed with Claude Giroux, who stopped playing last month because of a neck injury. - Sam Carchidi

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.30.2012

647220 Philadelphia Flyers

Inside the Flyers: Time for NHL and players to settle

Sam Carchidi

The NHL and the players' union appear to be getting closer to an agreement that would salvage a 48-game season.

If they don't settle, the league will suffer irreparable harm and it might take years for hockey to be considered a major sport again.

That's why the NHL made some concessions the other day, trying to save a partial season and stop the waves of apathy fans are riding.

For months, the league and the players' union have outsmarted themselves, playing a game of chicken and waiting for the other side to cave in.

But now, with a league-created Jan. 11 deadline almost here, the sides must get serious. They now have two options: sign a collective bargaining agreement or say goodbye to an entire season for the second time in nine years.

It seems incomprehensible that both sides would lose another season and squander about \$2 billion in revenue, which is what might be generated if a 48-game season were salvaged.

Give the NHL credit for stepping forward and trying to get the players back on the ice. The league made a handful of concessions, including one on the length of player contracts (increasing them to a six-year maximum; seven years if teams re-sign their own players), and agreeing to amnesty buyouts before next season. The parties had a conference call Saturday and tentatively plan to meet face-to-face Sunday for the first time since Dec. 13.

For the time being, Donald Fehr, executive director of the union, is expected to continue his Grinchness and complain that the owners need to significantly boost their proposed \$60 million salary cap for 2013-14, which is down from \$70.2 million (to be prorated over 48 games) this season. He is also expected to dourly explain that the owners' agreeing to one amnesty buyout per team next season is insignificant because the money comes from the players' 50 percent share of hockey-related revenue.

Oh, and we presume he will find a few other things he doesn't like.

It is expected that Fehr will fight for every nickel before finally getting a deal done around Jan. 11, when there is no more time to negotiate. That would enable the season to start Jan. 19.

If a new CBA is in place on Jan. 11, it will have taken nearly four months of watching Fehr - who, amazingly, wasn't ready to negotiate early in the summer, saying he needed more time to prepare - and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman tarnish the league and their legacies.

Judging by what has transpired during the 106 days of the lockout, it's clear Bettman and Fehr have one thing in mind: showing the other who is boss.

It's time for them to check their egos at the door and compromise for the good of the sport. This shouldn't be about who is the winner. It's too late for that. Way too late. Both sides are losers in what really matters - the opinion of fans who foot the bills for the millionaires and billionaires.

By arguing how to divide \$3.3 billion in a troubled economy, the NHL and the players have lost fans by the tens of thousands. It's time to compromise before a total fan revolt, before their apathy gives the NHL a bigger problem than trying to conquer Fehr.

The players have to understand that the NHL, because it overexpanded (bravo, Mr. Bettman) and has numerous teams losing money, is not the cash cow they think. The union should concede on the maximum lengths of contracts (now up to six years) and the length of the CBA (10 years, with a mutual opt-out after eight years). The owners have to realize that the players signed contracts in good faith, and they need to make concessions in other areas, perhaps increasing the cap from \$60 million to at least \$65 million for next season. That leaves more money to be spent on the players and reduces their escrow hit.

The sides have less than two weeks to show what's more important: winning for their side, or compromising for the greater good of the game. Bettman and Fehr should not think if their side "caves" it will be a sign of weakness

To the contrary, it will be viewed as a sign of maturity. And that's something we haven't seen - except for the day Bettman and Fehr were kept out of a (productive) meeting - in the last 106 days.

It's your move, gentlemen. Your legacies - and the league's integrity - depend on it.

Inside the Flyers: Lockout Scorecard

Here's a look at how the NHL and the players' union stand on several issues:

Issue Importance How close to agreement

Hockey-related revenueVerySeem agreeable

Length of player contractsVeryFairly close

10% variance per yr in contractSomewhatNot close

Length of CBAVeryFairly close

Amnesty buyoutsSomewhatNot close on some aspects

Escrow capsSomewhatNot close

Teams' cap limitVeryNot close

Free agency, arbitration rules Very Seem agreeable

"Make whole" provisionVerySeem agreeable

Breaking up unionSeen as NHLPA ployNHLPA can file thru Wed.

- Sam Carchidi

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.30.2012

647221 Philadelphia Flyers

Report: Briere injures wrist in Germany

Staff Writer

Flyers forward Danny Briere injured his wrist on Friday while playing with Eisbaren Berlin of the Deutsche Eishockey Liga of Germany and will miss two to three weeks of action, according to German-language site Eishockey.de (via HockeyBuzz.com's Bill Meltzer).

Briere scored a third period goal in Eisbaren's 3-1 win over ERC Ingostadt on Friday, but also went to the locker room at one point in the game after being checked along the boards. The injury is being called a wrist bone bruise, according to Meltzer.

The 35-year-old signed a contract extension with Eisbaren through the end of the DEL season on Thursday. The contract would allow Briere to depart Germany for Philadelphia if the NHL were to return this season (see story).

Briere found success in his time in Germany. He registered 10 goals and 24 assists for a team-high 34 points in 21 games with Eisbaren.

If Briere's recovery timetable is accurate, he will be available to the Flyers for the start of a shortened-season if and when a settlement can be reached between the NHL and players' union to end the current lockout.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.30.2012

647222 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL Notes: Seguin to head back from Switzerland

Staff Writer

The NHL has made a new offer to the NHL Players' Association that, according to multiple reports, contains some concessions in several key areas (see story).

Here's a look at other news from around the NHL:

Seguin coming back to U.S.

Boston Bruins star Tyler Seguin will return from Europe at the beginning of January, according to CSN New England Bruins insider Joe Haggerty. Seguin will come back at the conclusion of the Spengler Cup, the annual tournament held this week in Davos, Switzerland.

Seguin, 20, had been playing for HC Biel in Switzerland. Over his 29 games with the team, he scored 25 goals and totaled 40 points.

Seguin, the second overall pick in the 2010 draft, scored 29 goals and dished out 38 assists for the Bruins last season, his second in the NHL.

Blue Jackets, Jets could swap conferences

According to a tweet from Larry Brooks of The New York Post (via ProHockeyTalk), there have been talks that the Columbus Blue Jackets and Winnipeg Jets could swap conferences if the NHL lockout ends and a shortened season commences.

The switch, which would make it easier on travel in a condensed hockey season, would reportedly be in place for just the one season.

As ProHockeyTalk points out, this would likely mean a game between the Flyers and now-Blue Jackets goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.30.2012

647223 Pittsburgh Penguins

Hynes moves to top of great coaching list

Jonathan Bombulie

In the 14-year history of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins, two coaches have won at least 115 career games — Glenn Patrick and John Hynes.

Patrick needed four full seasons and 320 games to reach 115 victories. Hynes did it in his 176th game, two months into his third season behind the bench.

That 144-game disparity indicates a few things.

The first is that the Penguins, under general manager Ray Shero, take much more care crafting a strong AHL roster each season than they did under Craig Patrick.

The other is that Hynes is one heck of a coach.

"He demands a lot out of his players, and if you give it to him, you're going to get the results," winger Eric Tangradi said. "He's a smart man. He knows what it takes to win hockey games. He can be a disciplinarian. He can be

someone to lean on when you need it as well. I think he's a great balance of all those things."

This season has been a challenging one for Hynes.

Of the 29 players to suit up for the Baby Pens, eight are rookies, and seven others are free-agent acquisitions in their first season in the organization.

In other words, half the roster needed to be taught the way the Penguins do things.

"It's establishing how we want to work, the type of work habits we want to have, redefining what work is," Hynes said. "It's not that the players don't want to work. It's that it's different. Sometimes it's stopping and starting more than they want. It's taking different angles, trying to get them to have a little more thought in their game."

Perhaps as a result of the large amount of new players, the Baby Pens have been extraordinarily streaky this season. They started 0-4, then went 13-2 in their next 15 games, then followed that with a 1-6-1-1 streak.

The inconsistency didn't take Hynes by surprise.

"It's understandable in the development process and the team-building process, particularly with the team we have this year," he said. "It doesn't mean it's OK. It just means that's the process we're in and we've got to work to limit it."

A six-game winless streak ended with a 3-2 victory at Syracuse on Dec. 22. It was Hynes' 116th career victory, snapping the tie with Patrick on the team's all-time coaching wins list.

If history is any guide, Hynes won't be coaching in the AHL too much longer. After all, the last five Baby Pens head coaches have been promoted to the NHL.

Some, like Dan Bylsma, have become head coach of the Penguins. Others, like Todd Reirden, have become NHL assistants.

Because it's impossible to know which path will present itself, Hynes said he's not obsessed with his coaching future.

"We want to do the best job we can do here," Hynes said. "Hopefully that leads to a great year, players getting promoted to the National Hockey League and winning a Calder Cup. That's my focus."

Jonathan Bombulie has covered the Baby Pens for the Citizens' Voice in Wilkes-Barre since the team's inception in 1999.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.30.2012

647224 Pittsburgh Penguins

Plum native, 'Coach' Umberger proud of hometown

Josh Yohe

R.J. Umberger was feeling a bit sour after his alma mater, Ohio State, was stunned at the Three Rivers Classic by Penn State.

Still, the Plum native was able to see a bigger picture.

Youth hockey is booming in Pittsburgh, and college hockey is becoming a bigger deal. The first blue-chip hockey prospect to emerge from Western Pennsylvania couldn't be prouder.

"Just looking around today and seeing all the hockey fans in the building was great," Umberger said. "I can definitely say that things are a lot different now than when I was coming up. This is a great youth hockey town now."

Umberger was drafted 16th overall by the Vancouver Canucks in the 2001 NHL Entry Draft. Since then, Western Pennsylvania has emerged as one of the nation's more fertile recruiting areas, as highlighted by four local players being selected in the first 64 picks of the 2011 draft.

"It has been special to see how things have changed, and I loved seeing the enthusiasm for the college games this week," he said.

Umberger has been keeping himself busy during the NHL lockout in a unique way.

The former Ohio State star plays for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Thanks to the proximity to campus, Umberger decided to take advantage of his free time by helping out with the Buckeyes.

He was behind the bench during Ohio State's two games at Consol Energy Center this week

"Being around these college kids has really been great for me," Umberger said. "Of course at the same time, being around hockey all the time has made me miss playing the game even more. But still, it's been a great situation for me. Just working out with them is keeping me in shape, and getting an opportunity to work with them has really been great."

Umberger does not have a specific role on the coaching staff but has worked with the forwards extensively.

Ohio State remains dear to Umberger.

"I'm a very proud Buckeye," he said. "And I'm really very lucky to be playing in Columbus. It's a great city, and Ohio State is there. It's a really perfect situation for me."

Of course, before Umberger knew anything about Ohio State or Columbus, he was a Pittsburgher.

"This was a great week for Pittsburgh hockey," he said. "Having Penn State around is going to make it even better. Things are looking up for hockey in this city."

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.30.2012

647225 Pittsburgh Penguins

NHL owners, players union plot next move in negotiations

Rob Rossi

The NHL and Players' Association carefully are planning a next round of negotiations to prevent a second lost season in eight years.

Staff members to high-level NHL and NHLPA officials exchanged information on conference calls Saturday, but there are no plans for face-to-face bargaining to resume Sunday in New York.

Staff-level calls are scheduled for Sunday.

The sides are trying to establish a framework for midweek negotiations on a new labor contract, multiple sources said.

The sources also said the sides believe significant movement must happen by the end of next weekend to save the season.

The NHLPA still is studying a 300-page offer made by the NHL on Thursday. It is not known if the union will present a counterproposal or bargain off points from the NHL document.

"I think I'm like a lot of guys in that I don't really know all the details," Plum native R.J. Umberger said.

Umberger, a veteran forward with Columbus, served as an assistant coach for his alma mater, Ohio State, in the Buckeyes 5-4 loss to Penn State at Consol Energy Center in the Three Rivers Classic consolation game Saturday.

"I have no clue what's going to happen next," he said.

The lockout hit Day 105 Saturday. Games are canceled through Jan. 14, and a 48-game season must begin by "mid-January," deputy commissioner Bill Daly said.

NHL officials have steadfastly refused to set a drop-dead date to save the season. Sources provided the following details about plans for a season that would begin within about three weeks:

- Team sales staffs could begin selling single-game tickets by Jan. 15.
- Referees and linesmen are preparing to begin working games as soon as Jan. 18.
- Clubs are planning for seven days of training-camp practices, with a likely built-in off day. There would be no exhibition games.

• Clubs' hockey staffs are on alert to be ready to return to their NHL cities. Agents similarly have advised their clients playing overseas.

Precedent from the last 48-game season indicates the next week is critical if the NHL is to avoid losing a season after reporting a record \$3.3 billion in revenue.

A shortened 1995 season began Jan. 20. An owners' lockout ended Jan. 11.

The NHL did not cancel the 2004-05 season until Feb. 16, 2005. That lockout ended July 13.

The league and union have not met in person to negotiate since meeting in New York on Dec. 5 and 6. Neither NHL commissioner Gary Bettman nor union executive director Donald Fehr participated.

Bettman and Fehr have not taken part in face-to-face bargaining sessions since Nov. 29.

The union has until Tuesday to file a disclaimer of interest with the U.S. Department of Labor that would disband the union. Players on Dec. 21 authorized the executive board to make this legal maneuver.

The NHL has a pending class-action complaint against the union in New York federal court and an unfair practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

Staff writer Josh Yohe contributed. Rob Rossi is a staff writer for Trib Total Media.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.30.2012

647226 Pittsburgh Penguins

Union continues review of NHL's new offer

Shelly Anderson

In what could be a record for the longest time that a sports move is spent "under review," the NHL Players' Association is still poring over the latest collective bargaining agreement proposal submitted by the NHL.

Details of the proposal were discussed Saturday in conference calls that included representatives from the league and the union, and the sides are expected to continue at least an informal exchange today. Whether that leads to formal bargaining isn't clear but apparently is a good possibility.

Penguins forward Craig Adams, the team's union representative, said he was "not sure where we are after [Saturday]" and that he did not "know if everything was covered and clarified or if there is more to do."

The league and the union previously had formal talks Dec. 13 with the aid of a federal mediator.

The NHL, somewhat surprisingly, handed over a reworked proposal late Thursday that moved in the players' direction on several contract issues. The offer is roughly 300 pages.

Whether the NHLPA crafts a full counterproposal or opts to negotiate off of the league's most recent offer remains to be seen.

It is believed the league has decided that a shortened season of 48 games can be played only if a new CBA is in place, the lockout is lifted and games can begin by Jan. 19. There would need to be a short training camp before that. The schedule has been canceled through Jan. 14.

That leaves only a bit of wiggle room for negotiating before the NHL might cancel the 2012-13 season.

The lockout began in mid-September when the most recent CBA expired. The previous NHL work stoppage, also a lockout, wiped out the 2004-05 season.

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.30.2012

647227 St Louis Blues

Letters: Cancel the NHL season!

Don Reed

Just cancel the NHL season

This headline is getting old, the NHLPA and Gary Bettman need to realize that the season already is lost. No true hockey fan wants to see a 48-game abbreviated schedule. Is there really any glory to winning Lord Stanley's Cup in a shortened season with asterisks next to everything related to it?

As a Blues fan for the past 40 years and a season ticket holder in some form for the last 30, I know I will not be paying \$50 for a ticket, \$20 to park my car and \$10 for a beer anytime this season if they do settle and play. I will be back when the next full season starts because I do understand his is a business. But all fans have a limit when to draw the line and a shortened season is where I am doing that — along with my circle of hockey fans.

If they do play I just hope it's not the year the Blues finally win the Stanley Cup because it will not be as sweet as if it was won over a full season. Mr. Bettman please cancel the season and then settle your differences with the NHLPA and bring on the 2013-14 season.

Game over!

Russ Schwoebel

Rams get fan's attention

Bryan Burwell's "Festive mood rather lacking at Rams Park" is a wonderfully descriptive piece of writing. This year's Rams team has caught my attention, with its strong heart, intense desire to improve and willingness to stay the course for inspiring wins.

It would be great to see the team follow coach Jeff Fisher's lead, play its best Sunday and humble Seattle's lofty attitudes and over-rated rewards.

Do it for your fans, Rams! Play your best, hit your hardest, listen to your lifelong developed instincts and follow coach Fisher to victory!

Ed Beck • Ferguson

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.30.2012

647228 Tampa Bay Lightning

Sides talk, bargaining may be next

Staff Writer

NEW YORK --

Lots of questions, but still no answers in the NHL labor fight.

The league and the players' association spent much of Saturday talking to each other via conference call. The conversations were strictly for the purpose of sharing information regarding the new contract offer the NHL made to the union late Thursday.

The initial thought was that the sides would get together today in New York to hold official negotiations for the first time in weeks, but those hadn't been scheduled by late Saturday.

"Some more informational sessions in the morning," deputy commissioner Bill Daly said. "Nothing planned beyond that."

The union pored over the latest NHL proposal aimed at ending the lockout that reached its 105th day Saturday and saving the delayed hockey season. The league would like to reach a deal no later than Jan. 11, which would allow training camps to start the following day, and a 48-game season to begin on Jan. 19.

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.30.2012

647229 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning prospect J.T. Brown breaks collarbone in game

ERIK ERLENDSSON

Lightning prospect J.T. Brown will be out an indefinite amount of time after suffering a broken collarbone.

Brown, playing for Tampa Bay's minor league affiliate in Syracuse, N.Y., will require surgery to repair the fracture, which occurred during the first period Friday in Syracuse's 4-2 victory against Norfolk. Brown took a hit from Admirals' defenseman Mat Clark and did not return to the game.

While the injury is not expected to be season-ending, it likely will prevent Brown from an opportunity to compete for a spot with the Lightning should the NHL lockout be resolved in time to play a shortened season.

Syracuse general manager Julien BriseBois, who also serves as Lightning assistant GM, confirmed via email that surgery will be required and there is no timetable established at this point for when Brown would be expected to return. The logistics of the surgery were still being worked out as of Saturday afternoon.

"It's really unfortunate," Syracuse head coach Jon Cooper said. "On a positive note, it is a bone break and should heal in time for a playoff run."

Signed as a free agent out of the University of Minnesota-Duluth in March, Brown appeared in the final five games of the season for Tampa Bay last season registering an assist while playing in a top two-line role. He also went on to play for Team USA at the World Championships picking up a goal and two points in six games.

The 22-year-old was expected to compete for a role with the Lightning this season but has been playing in the American Hockey League this season due to the NHL lockout

With Syracuse this season Brown has six goals and 17 points in 26 games. His loss will be a blow to the Crunch.

"He was playing well, adapting to our system and a much needed right-handed shot on one of our power play units," Cooper said. "We are going to miss his speed and tenacity."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.30.2012

647230 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning's J.T. Brown breaks collarbone in AHL game, will miss 6-8 weeks

Damian Cristodero

Wing J.T. Brown was expected to be with the Lightning this season. But a broken collarbone sustained Friday while playing for AHL Syracuse ensured he will be sidelined if, as hoped, the NHL begins playing games by Jan. 19.

Brown, 22, needs surgery to repair a displaced fracture and will be out six to eight weeks, Crunch coach Jon Cooper said.

"He was just coming into his own," Cooper said Saturday. "In that regard, it's a tough injury."

Brown, who has six goals, 17 points in 26 games, was hurt during the first period of a 4-2 victory over Norfolk when driven into the corner boards with what Cooper called a clean but hard hit from Admirals defenseman Mat Clark.

Brown last season had one assist in five games for the Lightning after being signed as a free agent out of the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

"He showed last year that he could hold his own on the NHL level, so we have no doubt that he can," Lightning assistant general manager Julien BriseBois said. "But right now he's hurt, and the focus is on getting him back as quickly as possible."

NOTES: Tampa Bay right wing Dana Tyrell, out for four games with a sore groin, was back on the ice Friday for Slovakia's Banska Bystrica. ... Syracuse center Vladislav Namestnikov, a 2011 first-round draft pick, scored his first professional goal in Saturday's 5-4 overtime loss to St.

John's. It was his second game after missing 24 games because of a shoulder injury.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.30.2012

647231 Tampa Bay Lightning

Tampa Bay Lightning's J.T. Brown needs surgery to repair fractured collarbone (updated)

Staff Writer

J.T. Brown was expected to have a spot on the Tampa Bay Lightning's roster this season. But after the forward, playing for AHL Syracuse during the NHL lockout, sustained a fractured collarbone on Friday, he will not be ready if the NHL gets going, as many believe it will, in mid January.

"He showed last year that he could hold his own in the NHL, so we have no doubt he could," Lightning assistant general manager Julien BriseBois said Saturday. "But right now he's hurt and the focus is getting him back healthy as quickly as possible."

Brown was injured by a hit during the first period of a 4-2 victory over Norfolk. Syracuse coach Jon Cooper said Brown will be out six to eight weeks.

Cooper also relayed how the injury happened:

"Basically, we were on a power play and we won the draw, went to him and he was skating in the zone. The guy (Norfolk defenseman Mat Clark) engaged on him so he was kind of leaning on J.T., and J.T. was taking the puck behind the net and the guy just rode him awkwardly into the corner. J.T. kind of took an arm off his stick to kind of ward him off and, basically, they went into the boards. The guy put him into the boards hard, but I can't sit here and say it was a dirty play. It happens and it's too bad."

Brown, 22, has six goals, 17 points and four penalty minutes in 26 games for Syracuse. With great speed and vision on the ice and a nose for the net, he had one assist in five games for the Lightning last season after being signed out of the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

"It's hard for first-year players coming into that league," BriseBois said of the AHL. "It's really a good league and even better this year," because of the NHL lockout. "And on a team that's pretty deep, and where everyone is fighting for ice time, he was able to carve out a niche for himself and pick up some points, so he's been pretty good. He's just progressing really well for a first-year player."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.30.2012

647232 Toronto Maple Leafs

World juniors: Maple Leafs prospect Tyler Biggs has roots in football

Kevin McGran

UFA, RUSSIA—Tyler Biggs just loves to hit people. Doesn't mind getting hit himself.

That's a big reason the Toronto Maple Leafs drafted the power forward in the first round in 2011. That's a big reason why he's an important part of Team USA's entry into the world junior hockey championship.

But why does Biggs like to hit? Well, because he's also a pretty good football player. He used to be a linebacker.

"I love being in the play. I love hitting and getting hit," said Biggs. "At that position, you're definitely a big part of things on defence. I think that's why I like it."

Biggs gave up football to pursue hockey. He's not unusual on the American team in being a two-sport athlete. In fact, while Canadian hockey players tend to go 12 months a year in hockey, the American hockey program encourages players to play more than one sport:

- Jake Trouba and Shayne Gostisbehere were both pitchers on their high school teams.
- Winger John Gaudreau was a basketball point guard, and even on the ice
 like a point guard is looking to pass first.
- · Sean Kuraly is an avid tennis player.
- · Seth Jones was a pretty good lacrosse player.

"You don't want to get worn out in a sport and focus on one thing," said Trouba. "It's good to enjoy other things. And learn different habits and skills."

It was a conscious effort by USA Hockey to go this route, a means to try to lure the best athletes to the game by letting them keep their options open.

"We want more well-rounded athletes," said Jim Johansson, GM of the American team and director of hockey operations at USA Hockey. "One year we said, 'Boy, what if John Elway had played hockey?' He was the perfect guy for that.

"Now you have Seth Jones who basically grew up in Texas and Colorado—and he's playing hockey. Well, would that have happened 20, 25 years ago? I don't know. I really don't think it would have."

Besides, the approach Canada takes — all hockey all the time — wouldn't sell in the U.S.

"We have programs designed so that kids can have other interests, as well," said Johansson. "It's not just all or nothing because if hockey has a system that is 'all in,' then we have a system in which we lose them.

"They play a lot of sports and, hopefully, it matriculates to hockey, but it's not an all or nothing approach at a really young age."

As for the development of Biggs, Team USA coach Phil Housley says playing football has helped him at hockey.

"He's got tremendous feet for a big guy," said Housley. "He can cut back and turn tight. In the summer, he took a little bit of time to get going because he's a big guy. But at the end of the week, he was moving. He's skating well. He's in tremendous shape. He's a physical presence out there for us."

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.30.2012

647233 Toronto Maple Leafs

World juniors: Leafs prospect Garret Sparks takes goalie masks seriously

Kevin McGran

UFA, RUSSIA-Maple Leafs prospect Garret Sparks is mad-

Not at being the third goalie on Team USA at the world junior hockey championship. He's completely fine with that.

Nope, Sparks is upset his tribute mask to Eddie Belfour got held up at customs and returned to Canada.

See, Sparks takes his goalie mask seriously. He designs them in his spare time.

"I love to draw," said Sparks, the starting goalie with the Guelph Storm. "I have since I was little. Something you dream about as a goalie growing up is having your mask. Every goalie has seen other goalies' masks they love and want to have.

"I like to put a lot of time and effort into them," he added. "That's what your seen in most of the time. Might as well look good in it."

Sparks didn't have time to draw his Belfour tribute mask — a friend did — that's why it was separated from him. It was mailed to Finland — where the Americans trained before coming to Ufa — but got held up.

"It's got two eagles on the sides," said Sparks. "It looks like his Toronto mask. Two eagles on the sides, blue in the middle, with stars and two red ribbon stripes coming down the chin with feathers.

"I loved the Dallas Stars growing up. I love their Cup runs. My dad was a fan of him. I really liked him as a goalie. Thought his gear looked great. The eagles were always intimidating."

Sparks says he's happy to have the experience that comes with being named to Team USA, even if he doesn't even get to sit on the bench.

"I sit with the goalie coach. We talk during the game. I watch intently and pick up on things," said Sparks. "I have a lot of different jobs. I help out where needed, equipment guys, medical guys, media guys, coaches. Whatever they need."

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.30.2012

647234 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: League, union end day of conference calls to review latest offer

Chris Johnston

The NHL and NHL Players' Association want to exchange more information before resuming collective bargaining talks.

After holding a series of conference calls to review the NHL's latest proposal on Saturday afternoon, the sides made plans to resume the discussions on Sunday. Even though some of those talks were expected to be face-to-face at the league office in New York, it was unclear if they would include a response or counter-proposal from the NHLPA.

"[It was] purely informational today," deputy commissioner Bill Daly said Saturday night. "Going to have more of the same type sessions tomorrow. [We] haven't nailed down if or when we will have a bargaining session tomorrow."

First, the two sides must work through a comprehensive proposal from the NHL that spanned nearly 300 pages. That document was emailed from commissioner Gary Bettman to NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr on Thursday night and included movement from the league on contract rules along with the introduction of compliance buyouts for the first time during these negotiations.

It also included US\$300-million in deferred transition payments to the players, something the league had taken off the table when talks broke down on Dec. 6. That was the last true round of bargaining between the parties, which ended abruptly after the NHLPA countered an earlier offer from the league.

There should be some urgency from both sides to get back to the table with time running short to save a shortened 48-game season.

As part of the NHL's proposal this week, Bettman told the union that an agreement would have to be in place by Jan. 11, according to sources. That would allow training camps to open Jan. 12 and the puck to be dropped for the season on Jan. 19.

The league's latest offer calls for a six-year term limit on free-agent deals — up from five previously — and will allow teams to re-sign their own players for up to seven years. It also includes a provision that salary can vary by 10% from year to year during the course of a deal (the NHL's previous offer proposed a 5% variance).

Another key point is the inclusion of one-time compliance buyouts that would help teams transition from a system that saw players receive 57% of revenues to one that pays them 50%. The proposal gives each team one such buyout, with the money counting against the players' overall share in revenue but not an individual team's salary cap.

Despite the movement from the league, there is still clearly work to be done. Among the items in the proposal a source indicated the NHLPA isn't keen on is a US\$60-million salary cap in 2013-14, which the union believes will result in players paying a high rate of escrow.

If the key negotiators from each side aren't able to come up with a new CBA soon, the next battle between them is likely to be waged in court. The NHLPA's executive board has until Wednesday to file a "disclaimer of interest" that would see the union dissolved — a legal manoeuvre that would allow players to file anti-trust lawsuits against the league.

There is also a pending class-action lawsuit from the NHL filed with the U.S. federal court in New York. Earlier this month, it asked the court to rule on the legality of the lockout and argued that the NHLPA was only using the threat of a "disclaimer of interest" as a bargaining tactic to "extract more favourable terms and conditions of employment."

In the meantime, the damage caused by another lockout continues to worsen

Players are set to miss their sixth paycheque of the 2012-13 season on Sunday while the positive attention the league has been accustomed to receiving over the new year's holiday with the Winter Classic outdoor game appears as though it will be replaced by more focus on the labour dispute.

The 105-day lockout has forced the cancellation of 625 games and is now the second longest in league history. In 1994-95, the lockout lasted 103 days before an agreement was reached. The labour dispute that wiped out the entire 2004-05 season spanned 301 days.

National Post LOADED: 12.30.2012

647235 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Latest offer kickstarts renewed negotiations with players'

Ira Podell

Time a major player in NHL negotiations

According to someone who used to work inside the baseball players' union, Donald Fehr was the kind of boss who would let employees voice their opinions, so long as they were informed opinions. He would not scream during meetings: "He would be the traffic cop, sometimes calling 'time' – literally putting his fingers up and calling 'time.' "

And he would plan.

The former colleague, who requested anonymity, said Fehr was legendary for his need to "war-game" during labour negotiations. No statement he ever made from the podium was unscripted and no tactic was unplanned. He was calculating, meticulous and patient.

That approach, at least on the surface, appeared to earn a round of validation on Friday as details emerged of an unexpected offer from the National Hockey League.

Continue reading...

NEW YORK — The NHL is set to get back to the bargaining table with the NHL Players' Association after a new contract offer from the league broke the ice between the sides.

Those talks are scheduled to take place Sunday in New York, nearly one month after negotiations broke down and pushed the sides further apart.

Without fanfare, the NHL said Friday that it made a new proposal to the union on Thursday in an effort to end the lockout and save the delayed hockey season.

The NHLPA was still reviewing the document, which was several hundred pages in length, on Friday night and planned to speak to the NHL by telephone on Saturday, and then get together with the league on Sunday.

The sides haven't met since a second round of talks with a federal mediator ended on Dec. 13. They haven't had formal negotiations alone since the first week of the month.

Time is running out to come to an agreement and then play a season of at least 48 games — a number the NHL set as a minimum. The league would like to reach a deal by Jan. 11, start training camp the following day, and open the season by Jan. 19.

"We delivered to the union a new, comprehensive proposal for a successor CBA," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said in a statement Friday. "We are not prepared to discuss the details of our proposal at this time. We are hopeful that once the union's staff and negotiating committee have had an opportunity to thoroughly review and consider our new proposal, they will

share it with the players. We want to be back on the ice as soon as possible."

The players' association's executive board and negotiating committee went over the proposal during an internal conference call on Friday, the 104th day of the lockout.

A person familiar with key points of the offer told The Associated Press that the league proposed raising the limit of individual free-agent contracts to six years from five — seven years if a team re-signs its own player; raising the salary variance from one year to another to 10%, up from 5%; and one compliance buyout for the 2013-14 season that wouldn't count toward a team's salary cap but would be included in the overall players' share of income.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because details of the new offer were not being discussed publicly.

The NHL maintained the deferred payment amount of \$300-million it offered in its previous proposal, an increase from an earlier offer of \$211-million. The initial \$300-million offer was pulled off the table after negotiations broke off earlier this month.

The latest proposal is for 10 years, running through the 2021-22 season, with both sides having the right to opt out after eight years.

The lockout has reached a critical stage, threatening to shut down a season for the second time in eight years. All games through Jan. 14, plus the Winter Classic and the All-Star game already have been called off. The next round of cuts could claim the entire schedule.

The NHL is the only North American professional sports league to cancel a season because of a labour dispute, losing the 2004-05 campaign to a lockout. A 48-game season was played in 1995 after a lockout stretched into January.

It is still possible this dispute could eventually be settled in the courts if the sides can't reach a deal on their own.

The NHL filed a class-action suit this month in U.S. District Court in New York in an effort to show its lockout is legal. In a separate move, the league filed an unfair labour practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board, contending bad-faith bargaining by the union.

Those moves were made because the players' association took steps toward potentially filing a "disclaimer of interest," which would dissolve the union and make it a trade association. That would allow players to file antitrust lawsuits against the NHL.

Union members voted overwhelmingly to give their board the power to file the disclaimer by Jan. 2. If that deadline passes, another authorization vote could be held to approve a later filing.

Negotiations between the NHL and the union have been at a standstill since talks ended Dec. 6. One week later, the sides convened again with federal mediators in New Jersey, but still couldn't make progress.

The sides have been unable to reach agreement on the length of the new deal, the length of individual player contracts, and the variance in salary from year to year. The NHL is looking for an even split of revenues with players.

The NHL pulled all previous offers off the table after the union didn't agree to terms on its last proposal without negotiation.

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NHL lockout: Time becomes major player in labour negotiations

Sean Fitz-Gerald

According to someone who used to work inside the baseball players' union, Donald Fehr was the kind of boss who would let employees voice their opinions, so long as they were informed opinions. He would not scream during meetings: "He would be the traffic cop, sometimes calling 'time' – literally putting his fingers up and calling 'time.' "

And he would plan.

The former colleague, who requested anonymity, said Fehr was legendary for his need to "war-game" during labour negotiations. No statement he ever made from the podium was unscripted and no tactic was unplanned. He was calculating, meticulous and patient.

That approach, at least on the surface, appeared to earn a round of validation on Friday as details emerged of an unexpected offer from the National Hockey League. The offer, sent via email on Thursday, was reportedly 300 pages long, with concessions on items thought to be immovable.

The highlights, as reported by ESPN.com: Player contracts would be capped at six years, and not five, with the option for teams to sign their own players to seven-year deals; the contract value would be allowed to move up to 10% in value year-over-year from the first year, instead of 5%; hockey-related revenue would be split 50-50; and owners would provide US\$300-million to help cover existing contracts in a tighter economic climate, known as the "make whole" provision.

"We want to be back on the ice as soon as possible," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said in a news release issued after those details emerged Friday.

"I don't think this is going to be an all-out win for either side," George Smith, a Queen's University professor and former labour negotiator, said on Friday. "I think they both will have compromised. But I think the players might have compromised less than they would have otherwise."

People can sign as many Facebook petitions as they want to say, 'I'll never watch the NHL again if they don't have a deal by Jan. 1,' but the fact of the matter is, we will all watch again

The players, led by Fehr and his brother, Steve, who is serving as special counsel, did not offer an immediate response. They reportedly held a conference call in the afternoon, and were planning to take their time to comb over the document.

Time, of course, is perhaps the union's last true lever of power in these negotiations. And Fehr has proven adept at managing — or, depending on the viewpoint, wasting — time.

"To get the best deal possible, you oftentimes need to push the other side as close to the edge of the cliff as you can," said Keith Burkhardt, a labour lawyer with Toronto-based Sherrard Kuzz LLP. "And then they finally say, 'I give in, I give in — take what you want, and then we'll go on with life."

Several outlets reported the NHL had finally given a drop-dead date for a season to begin, widely reported to be Jan. 19. A deal, then, would need to be reached within the next two weeks. That would suggest the cliff is approaching, but not quite close enough to end the negotiations just yet.

"It seems like it's the players who had more to lose than the owners," Burkhardt said. "I think the owners believed from the beginning that fans would return. People can sign as many Facebook petitions as they want to say, 'I'll never watch the NHL again if they don't have a deal by Jan. 1,' but the fact of the matter is, we will all watch again."

So the owners engaged strategically in talks, he said. Burkhardt suggested the players' solidarity might have been undercut by the volume of union members who fled to play in Europe instead of remaining on the sidelines.

And still, it was commissioner Gary Bettman who looked visibly shaken during a Dec. 6 question-and-answer session with reporters after another breakdown in negotiations. Fehr remained calm. And quiet, with no official talks between the two sides since Dec. 13.

In the meantime, the NHL has a filed a complaint in federal court in New York asking to have the lockout declared legal, while also filing an unfair labour practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board in the United States. The NHLPA has given itself a Jan. 2 deadline to file a disclaimer of interest — to dissolve the union, and to potentially take the entire process down a path with an uncertain end.

That the email offer from the league arrived six days before that deadline may not be a coincidence. Somebody might even have been planning on it.

"Now, whether that was motivated by the NHLPA's authorization to disclaim interest, or simply by the fact that we are rapidly approaching the deadline to cancel the season, is difficult to tell," said Nathaniel Grow, an assistant professor at the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia. "It is probably a combination of the two."

National Post LOADED: 12.30.2012 647237 Vancouver Canucks

Kuzma: Canucks preparing for the unknown

Ben Kuzma

The first post-lockout domino should fall in these parts like a giant Douglas fir if the Vancouver Canucks expect to maximize a return for Roberto Luongo. Should a shortened season come to fruition, a 48-game sprint will test the Presidents' Trophy winners resolve to not trip over expectations or run out of gas. Or run out of bodies.

"We're definitely confident," said defenceman Kevin Bieksa. "But it's going to be a unique situation. We don't know how much time we'll have (to get ready) and we'll still probably have a few little changes to our lineup."

In the big picture they may be little. But they will be important.

What the Canucks could or should ice if play commences Jan. 19 starts in goal. Cory Schneider has honed his game in Switzerland and by being crowned the starter in the third game of the Stanley Cup playoffs last spring — in advance of his three-year, \$12 million US contract extension — it made Luongo a prominent piece in an offseason chess match with several suitors.

As much as the Canucks could retain Schneider and Luongo with the salary cap ceiling staying at \$70.2 million this season, the obvious optics, media feeding frenzy and need to strengthen the roster should dismiss any notion of keeping the tandem intact.

Even if buying out Luongo's contract next summer is an option in a new collective bargaining agreement, the Canucks need a third-line centre. They need a depth defenceman. And they need a back-up goalie.

The Toronto Maple Leafs remain at the front of the Luongo line — just like they were at the draft — and what general manager Mike Gillis receives from a desperate club that may finally make the playoffs with a front-line stopper, should allow the Canucks to get better, younger and improve their cap position.

I would target centre Tyler Bozak and restricted free agent defenceman Cody Franson because they fill those needs. Bozak, 26, had 18 goals and 47 points last season. He is insurance in case first-round pick Jordan Schroeder can't play at the NHL level and if Ryan Kesler takes as long to recuperate from offseason shoulder and wrist surgeries — several months — as his agent predicted Dec. 14. And with what's left on an expiring \$1.5 million contract, the undrafted Bozak isn't really a gamble. The 6-foot-1, 200 pound Regina native either buys the Canucks time to stay patient with Schroeder or look for other options after parting with Cody Hodgson at the trade deadline.

Franson, 25, was expendable in the deep Nashville Predators back end and exposed in a Maple Leafs blueline featuring big contracts and big question marks. The former Vancouver Giant managed five goals and 21 points in 57 games last season in which he earned \$800,000. He is currently playing in the Swedish Elite League.

The 6-foot-5, 213 pound Sicamous native would add depth and untapped potential because the Canucks like to carry eight defenceman. With Alex Edler (back) and Jason Garrison (groin) coming off injuries and facing a condensed schedule, Andrew Alberts is the depth option. Unrestricted free agent Jim Vandermeer, 32, has been skating with the locked-out Canucks at UBC and would be an affordable veteran fit. There were some prelockout discussions with the Canucks, who could opt to go another way, like Franson or an unsigned AHL player. Then again, with a narrow window to win, the Canucks could use Vandermeer's toughness — especially in the postseason.

"I like to think I can play all aspects of the game," said the 6-foot-1, 214 pound Red Deer native, who earned \$1 million last season with the San Jose Sharks and missed 20 games with a broken hand after blocking a shot. "I can be a little offensive and be good defensively and stand up for the guys and play a physical game."

Once the Canucks figure out the return on Luongo, they need to determine who's best suited to pair with Schneider. Eddie Lack's contract reverts to a

one-way deal next season and he should finish this season with the AHL affiliate Chicago Wolves to improve his consistency and professionalism. The towering 24-year-old Swede also suffered a hip-flexor injury last month and was sporting a 7-4-1 record with a 3.00 goals-against average and .899 saves percentage.

Which brings us to the crease conundrum. The Canucks need an affordable short-term fix who's not too long in the tooth. If Schneider falters or is injured, the back-up has to have front-line potential. There are probably a half dozen free-agent options but Dan Ellis should merit consideration. The 32-year-old former Anaheim Ducks, Tampa Bay Lightning and Nashville Predators stopper is having a strong AHL season with the Charlotte Checkers after signing a tryout contract. With a 7-5-2 record, 2.50 GAA and .920 saves percentage, he's proving what he said in an e-mail to this reporter in the summer. He would make a good back up to Schneider, despite playing just 10 games last season behind Jonas Hiller in Anaheim.

"I would love to back up Cory if the spot becomes available," Ellis said in the e-mail. "Helping young goalies get to their full potential is fun to be a part of. Sometimes just lightening their load makes all the difference in the world. I've been in the NHL for five years and every year it seems like I've been in a 1A and 1B situation. I've been able to push my partner but also help make him better."

In his first season with the Predators, Ellis teamed with Chris Mason and won the starting role. In 2008-09 it was Pekka Rinne who won the top job before Ellis worked in tandem with Mike Smith and Dwayne Roloson in Tampa and then Hiller in Anaheim.

Ellis earned \$1.5 million for going 1-5-0 last season with a 2.72 GAA and .911 saves percentage — far removed from a career-best 23-10-3 with the Predators in 2007-08. Ellis and Schneider are represented by agent Mike Liut, but there wasn't any pre-lockout contact with the Canucks. That could change. Especially if Ellis is willing to accept a short-term affordable deal that would allow Lack to develop.

"Whatever is best for the team," stressed Ellis. "I've never been a guy who chased the money. I'm at the point where I want to help a team win the Stanley Cup with whatever role that is. I feel I can bring those quality minutes."

Other notable free-agent options are record-setting Abbotsford Heat goalie Barry Brust, 29, who's trying to re-kindle his NHL career and Marty Turco, 37, who briefly played in Austria during the lockout.

Free agency was also a factor in how the Canucks could have looked on opening day. When unrestricted free agent winger Shane Doan decided to remain in Phoenix instead of relocating to Vancouver, the durable leader would have brought another dimension to the top-six mix.

The other miss was collegiate free agent Justin Schultz. The slick puckmoving defenceman chose the long-term potential of the Edmonton Oilers over a proven contender in Vancouver. With 16 goals and 43 points in his first 30 AHL games with the Oklahoma City Barons, Schultz looks NHL ready.

Doan, who turns 36 in October, has missed just 15 games the last five seasons and is coming off 22 goals and 50 points last season. It means Alex Burrows will remain on the top line with Henrik and Daniel Sedin and that should be of some comfort. The versatile Burrows doesn't get the credit he deserves and the four-year, \$18 million extension he signed a day before the lockout should ease any career concerns — or perhaps losing that first-line spot to Doan.

"I look at it that it would have been great to add another great player to our core group and give us a chance to succeed because I'm at that point in my career where I want to win and the better players we can have, the better for me," said Burrows, who had 28 goals last season. "I'm sure with everybody pushing, we'll be able to do the right things and find the right time to play our best hockey."

That may mean Bozak could find himself centring Chris Higgins and David Booth until Kesler heals. Higgins has played centre but is more comfortable and consistent as a winger. That would also allow Maxim Lapierre to centre a third line with Mason Raymond and Jannik Hansen. Less pressure and more of a two-way presence could help Raymond rebound with his contract expiring and improve from 10 goals in 55 games last season and just 15 in 70 games in the 2010-11 campaign.

Manny Malhotra's face-off efficiency — fourth in the league at 58.5 per cent — means he should either centre or play wing on the fourth line. If he plays in the middle, we'll see what playing for the Tilburg Trappers of the Dutch

Elite League did for grinder Dale Weise. He avoided arbitration by agreeing to a one-year, one-way deal for \$615,000 US and must reward the faith and score more than the four goals he had last season in 68 games.

That would put Zack Kassian on the other wing as a starting point to prove he can blossom into the power forward management is counting on. In his first 25 games with the Wolves, he had six goals and 16 points and 55 penalty minutes. Kassian showed flashes of improvement and intimidation, but was also a healthy scratch for a Dec. 1 game. Where his head is at will be as important as his fitness and puck skills. That would leave centre Andrew Ebbett as the 13th forward.

To know where you're going in a race to the playoffs, you have to know where you're been and what you've learned. A sobering five-game playoff series loss to the Los Angeles Kings proved the Canucks were ill-prepared. They tried to manufacture urgency with a high postseason secured and when 30-goal scorer Daniel Sedin was lost for a dozen games following a March 21 concussion, they looked lost.

"Experience sometimes hurts," admitted coach Alain Vigneault. "But it's going to help our whole group better."

To do that in a short season, the Canucks can't have rollercoaster rides. They should capture the Northwest Division for the fifth-consecutive time if they remain consistent.

After all, a Stanley Cup hangover produced a 5-5-1 October, but the bigger concern was what occurred after a vengeful 4-3 win in Boston on Jan. 7. The Canucks relied on great goaltending and 15 of their final 25 regular-season wins were by one goal. The Canucks led the league with a 24.4 per cent power play after the Bruins triumph and then went 16-for-117 (13.6 per cent) and were blanked 13 times in their final 18 games. They became predictable and stagnant and a paltry 3-for-21 (14.3 per cent) in the postseason.

"It was definitely a learning thing and a failure, but we can do it with the group we have," said Booth, who scored just once in his final 16 games, including being blanked in his first postseason. "We can play with any team in the league and beat any team in the league."

We'll see.

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MY OPENING-NIGHT ROSTER

LINES

D. Sedin-H.Sedin-Burrows

Higgins-Bozak-Booth

Raymond-Lapierre-Hansen

Weise-Malhotra-Kassian

Ryan Kesler (injured), Andrew Ebbett (13th forward), Jordan Schroeder (minors), Aaron Volpatti (minors).

PAIRINGS

Hamhuis-Bieksa

Edler-Garrison

Ballard-Tanev

Alberts-Franson

GOAL

Schneider-Ellis

Read more:

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647238 Vancouver Canucks

Gallagher: When Canucks return, what will they look like?

Tony Gallagher

When sports editor Jonathan McDonald suggested gazing into the crystal ball for the last column of the year, it seemed like a risky proposition.

Predictions of any kind are difficult, particularly with respect to the NHL's collective-bargaining negotiations with their players and, assuming there will be a season, what might happen beyond that in a shortened season. That is totally uncharted territory for any modern-era team, given it hasn't happened since '95.

Looking into said ball is clear enough early on and the vision is no different than it's always been.

There will be a deal because neither side can possibly endure a "no deal" scenario. It's entirely too destructive for either side and, in fact, may already have been, so they'll stumble their way to some kind of agreement and get the game back on the ice in some form.

And that's where it gets interesting for fans of the Vancouver Canucks who aren't strong enough to keep their resolve to stay away from the product the Aquilini family is peddling down at Rogers Arena.

There are all kinds of pressing questions about this team, the obvious and the not-so-easily-identifiable issues that have been quietly festering.

One would expect Keith Ballard to be bought out to liberate \$4.2-million US cap space for the Canucks to get into position for next season.

However, in the meantime, he'll likely still be around labouring under a coach who has essentially sapped most everything anyone remembers from what was once a very good and exciting player.

Ballard, of course, shares some of the blame for not asking to be traded, but the pathology is likely to continue for another season anyway.

Obviously, the health of Ryan Kesler will be front and centre along with the off-loading of Roberto Luongo, but then we come to the real puzzler.

It is a question that hasn't been fully resolved in any obit over what happened last year; nor has it been much speculated about other than in discussions about the Canucks' "window" to win a Stanley Cup.

We speak here about what happened to the Sedin twins in the second half of last season.

As many have conveniently forgotten, after that ridiculous roughhouse game in Boston, the Sedins essentially took a break from being the dynamic scoring duo they've been for most of their careers here and became window dressing.

Yes, Daniel Sedin suffered that concussion and missed the last 10 games, and Henrik was absolutely everything you could ask of a captain in that series against the Kings with five points in five games, splitting a gut to try to prevent the team's early ouster.

But their magic was absent and, worse yet, they began mumbling about not having to score every night as long as the team wins — and other such perplexing nonsense.

Was that a temporary slump that could happen to anyone after a long 2011 run to the final from which they will recover?

Was it a function of a stumbling power play that had run out of energy and creativity, or was it the beginning of an inevitable decline for older forwards?

A couple of weeks back, Canucks GM Mike Gillis — in his never-ending quest to establish that this team does have a "window" to win — suggested the programs the Canucks have initiated will keep their players "healthier and keep them playing longer."

He also thinks that, because of the way the Sedins live and train, they may not necessarily drop off as quickly as some might expect.

And there has always been this dominating perception that, when a player in his 20s goes dry, it's a bad year, but when he's in his 30s, he's finished. And that is and always has been ridiculous.

But until they get back into the saddle and start pumping pucks into the net at their traditional pace, that question is going to be hanging over this team as much as any other issue.

And the riddle may not be fully solved until Kesler gets back up to speed to provide a genuine second-line threat.

The way things stand to start at least, any second line centered by the likes of Max Lapierre, Chris Higgins or any of the other candidates suggested may not induce open laughter from opponents, but it certainly won't be classified as Stanley Cup material.

If all these issues go wonderfully well, this team could get back for a run at the Western final. If they get a poor start and these issues go sour, they could miss the playoffs.

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647239 Winnipeg Jets

A year to forget in Winnipeg sports

Paul Friesen

Normally this is supposed to be a rumination of the year that was. A look back at some of the highlights of the last 12 months.

There. Done.

Seriously, 2012 will not go down as a memorable one for Winnipeg sports fans.

Going in, our local CFLers were supposed to follow up their 2011 Grey Cup appearance with another serious run at their first championship in more than two decades.

Instead, the Blue Bombers turned out to be a one-year wonder.

A few clicks to the east down Portage Avenue, there at least were some highs involving our pucksters.

But our exciting new taste for the NHL would turn more sour by the month, beginning with the Jets crash-and-burn from playoff contention and culminating with the hollow, clanging sound of yet another lockout.

Considering we had one the year before the original Jets bolted for Phoenix, I suppose it's some sort of cruel symmetry we have one the year after they return.

Wasn't 2012 also supposed to usher in an exciting new era in sports facilities in this town?

Alas, we've killed enough trees on that story.

Add it all up, and it's enough to make a Winnipeg sports nut go nuts.

Instead of revisiting the gory details, I thought we'd look ahead.

So here are five storylines worth watching going into what has to be a better year in the toy department.

Because it couldn't get any worse - could it?

Frozen Fallout

As of this writing, the NHL had cancelled games through Jan. 14, or more than half the season.

That doesn't mean we can't have a compressed 48-game campaign, probably with conference play only.

But the two sides are getting closer and closer to the edge of that cliff, as that type of season would have to start around Jan. 20.

You'd think the deadline would produce a deal, like most deadlines do in labour negotiations.

You wonder, though, how much anger the players and owners have stirred up in fans and sponsors, and how it'll be manifested whenever they do get back on the ice.

End of the Honeymoon

On a related topic, a few members of the Jets have had bad off-seasons, led by Ondrej Pavelec's drunk driving crash and conviction in the Czech Republic.

Others, defenceman Ron Hainsey — the face of the lockout — and winger Evander (Moneybags) Kane have simply raised the ire of fans looking for people to blame for not having hockey.

Coupled with the normal subsiding of the NHL honeymoon, does the local shinny shack become a less friendly place for the home side in 2013 and beyond?

Field of Dreams

The Bombers will finally move into that spectacular facility down at the U of M, and that will create quite a buzz on its own.

Until 2013's opening kickoff, at least.

How the Bombers play in their new digs will either buff the place to an impressive shine and launch the team to new financial heights or tarnish it, hurting the team's ability to "maximize revenues," as they say.

After last year — the losing, the security clampdown, the firing of yet another head coach — the Bombers don't have a lot of credit in the fan goodwill account right now.

There shouldn't be any empty seats in the first year of a facility that's now costing \$200 million.

If there are, it won't help the Bombers as they begin repaying a whopping \$95 million in debt.

Armed or Dangerous?

What happens at quarterback for the Bombers is the story to watch on the field in 2013.

There isn't a team in the CFL more in flux at football's most important position.

If the Bombers don't get this right — having Buck Pierce somehow complete a successful season or finding someone who can — they will be doomed to extend the longest championship drought in franchise history to a 23rd year, and then some.

That's a dangerous road to stay on, new stadium or not.

If the Bombers solve their quarterback problem, GM Joe Mack will have gone a long way to saving his job.

Entering the last year of his contract with a 21-35 record in games that matter, Mack needs to show CEO Garth Buchko he knows how to build a consistent winner, not just a team that stumbles into the Grey Cup game once in a while.

If the Bombers post another losing season, Buchko will be forced to undergo the difficult task of conducting a GM search, and the Bombers will be back at the drawing board. Again.

That would leave a lousy taste in the mouths of poor, downtrodden Bomber Nation

It's true head coach Tim Burke will be under the microscope in his first full season as head chef. But it's Mack's job to supply the ingredients.

So there's you're recipe for a successful 2013.

After the past year's heartache, is that too much to ask?

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647240 Winnipeg Jets

The year in review, Jets edition

Ken Wiebe

A year to forget in Winnipeg sports

There hasn't been an NHL game played at the MTS Centre since early April.

The next time the puck drops is still anyone's guess, as the NHL lockout is threatening to force the cancellation of another season.

When thinking back on 2012, will Winnipeg Jets fans remember the thrill of the NHLs return after a 15-year-absence or be upset or apathetic about the elongated labour stoppage?

It's true there is plenty of frustration being felt right now, but we expect the mood to change once a new collective bargaining agreement is signed, so look for plenty of passion to be on display whenever that occurs.

Although the new season won't start until at least mid-January — if it starts at all — here's a quick look back at the Top-10 Jets' stories of 2012:

10) Bogosian needs surgery

Fourth-year D-man Zach Bogosian went under the knife in late August to repair a wrist injury and was expected to be out of action for roughly six months. One of the few positives for the Jets about the lockout is that they won't be without one of their top rearguards for very long, should the season be saved. Bogosian flourished under the tutelage of assistant coach Charlie Huddy last season and quickly became a fan favourite. When healthy, Bogosian is going to log 25-plus minutes per game and play in all situations.

9) Jets draft Trouba

There was plenty of speculation the Jets would opt for another high-scoring forward with some size with the ninth overall selection in the 2012 NHL Entry Draft in Pittsburgh, but when GM Kevin Cheveldayoff stepped to the podium he decided on defenceman Jacob Trouba from the U.S. national development team instead. Trouba, a hard-hitting blue-liner with some offensive upside, is having an excellent freshman season with the University of Michigan Wolverines and is back for a second stint with Team USA at the world junior championship. Once he decides to turn pro, it shouldn't take long for him to figure into the Jets' plans.

8) Enstrom signs extension

Going into the off-season, there was plenty of speculation about whether or not Toby Enstrom was in the Jets' long-term plans, simply because of his contract status as a pending unrestricted free agent on July 1 of 2013. However, the smooth-skating blue-liner inked a five-year extension worth \$5.75 per season in late July and will continue his role as Dustin Byfuglien's security blanket for the foreseeable future.

7) Scheifele continues development

Although he was sent back to the Ontario Hockey League after appearing in his first seven NHL games, the Jets' 2011 first rounder earned a bronze medal at the 2012 world junior hockey championship, had a strong playoff with the Barrie Colts and then joined the St. John's IceCaps for the Calder Cup playoffs in the AHL. He's been a dominant player with the Colts this season and is playing on Canada's top line at the 2013 world junior in Russia. Is Scheifele ready for full-time NHL duty? The Jets don't want to rush him, but Scheifele might force his way onto the team.

6) Jets sign big centre

Looking to upgrade down the middle, the Jets inked Finnish centre Olli Jokinen to a two-year deal worth \$9 million on July 1, making their first real big splash in the free-agent pool. Jokinen has been a consistent performer throughout his career and gives the Jets a bigger and more experienced option at centre on the top line.

5) Hainsey in heart of battle

Throughout the lockout, Jets player rep Ron Hainsey has often been seen at the side of NHLPA lead negotiator Don Fehr and his brother Steve, taking on a key role in the CBA talks. Jets' players are happy to have Hainsey representing them at the table because he's a bright and articulate guy who isn't easily intimidated inside the board room. While Hainsey has been the man at the table, Jets captain Andrew Ladd has been carrying the bulk of the burden keeping the Winnipeg media up to speed on where things stand and where the players are coming from.

4) Jets miss playoffs

After staying in the race for a good chunk of the season and actually pushing into a tie for top spot in the Southeast Division in February, the Jets were officially eliminated from contention after Game 79 and dropped to 11th overall in the Eastern Conference standings. Special teams woes and an inability to win enough on the road were the two biggest reasons the Jets found themselves on the outside looking in last spring.

3) Wheeler breaks out

Despite a slow start that saw him need 19 games to register his first goal of the campaign, right-winger Blake Wheeler grew into the role as a top-flight performer, leading the Jets with 64 points in 80 games. The fifth overall pick of the 2004 NHL Entry Draft has excellent speed, is a gifted player and went through a lengthy stretch where he was a point-per-game player. Wheeler is motivated to take his game to another level and embraces the challenge of being one of the go-to guys on the roster.

2) Pavelec keeps secret

After appearing in a career-high 68 games last season, where he was clearly the Jets' Most Valuable Player, Ondrej Pavelec was due for a raise and he got one in the form of a five-year deal worth \$19.5 million. Later in the summer, it was revealed that Pavelec was charged (and later convicted) for driving under the influence in the Czech Republic and hadn't disclosed the information during the negotiation. That didn't sit well with the folks at True North Sports and Entertainment and Pavelec still needs to sit down to discuss the matter with Cheveldayoff once the lockout ends.

1) Kane makes headlines

Third-year winger Evander Kane garnered plenty of headlines during his first season in Winnipeg and became a bit of a polarizing figure. Wearing Bobby Hull's No. 9, Kane went out and put up strong numbers, producing career highs for goals (30), assists (27) and points (57), without the benefit of first unit power play minutes. The negotiations moved at a slow pace for the restricted free agent, but just before the expiration of the CBA, the two sides agreed to a six-year deal worth \$31.5 million. Kane has occasionally drawn the ire of fans on Twitter — most recently for his mock call on the money phone to boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr. — and many people are wondering if he's going to finish the contract as a member of the Jets. Kane has some growing up to do, but he's pure goal scorer and could push for 40-plus if his on-ice progression continues.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 12.30.2012

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ESPN / It's time to play before it's too late

Scott Burnside

So the finish line appears, the point at which hope and belief and gut instinct finally intersects with reality.

Even in the darkest, most silent days of this frustrating labor dispute between the NHL and its locked-out players, there has always been a sense of quiet optimism that at some point there would be a resolution.

That belief, sometimes muted, sometimes unequivocal, emanated from every rung on the hockey ladder.

Talk to governors, owners and team presidents and they always quietly insisted that a deal would be made to save at least a portion of this season.

Players, too, while angry with the NHL owners and commissioner Gary Bettman, always talked about a gut feeling that a deal was possible, if not imminent.

GMs, coaches, scouts all wondered about the timeline, but invariably expressed belief that the two sides would not allow a second NHL season in eight years to be wiped away.

Those in the press corps covering the dispute, especially those who covered the one that scuttled the entire 2004-05 season putting the NHL in a league of its own when it comes to labor blunders, concurred that surely even a sport with a penchant for the backwards could not be so stupid as to ruin itself with two wasted seasons.

But as the two sides went silent the past two weeks after the now infamous drama masking as negotiations in New York, the players giving their executive board near unanimous approval to file a disclaimer of interest and dissolve the union and the owners filing a pre-emptive suit in New York along with a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board, it seemed that perhaps everyone involved had confused belief with wishful thinking.

Now, as the owners have shifted once again on their previous position in presenting a new, comprehensive offer to the players and with a more or less firm deadline of having the puck drop no later than Jan. 19 in order to save a minimum 48-game schedule in place, it seems we will finally be rewarded with an answer.

The two sides are expected to meet face-to-face in New York at some point Sunday or Monday morning following a lengthy series of conference calls Saturday aimed at clearing the air on questions pertaining to the league's most detailed offer to date to begin final deliberations on the fate of the season.

At some point in the next 24 to 48 hours, Bettman and his counterpart Donald Fehr, executive director of the NHLPA, will put their final, indelible mark on a process that has been described by more than one labor/sports expert as a textbook example in how not to resolve a labor dispute.

At some point in the next day or so, Bettman's and Fehr's constituents, the owners and players, will have one last chance to make their feelings known and likewise make an indelible mark on the outcome.

It's not going to be a cakewalk. Not by any stretch.

The players don't like the drop in salary cap proposed in the new deal from \$70.2 million this season to \$60 million next season.

And they don't like that the league's plans for a one-time amnesty buyout before the start of next season will come out of the players' share of hockey-related revenues (although it won't count against team caps).

But are these issues on which to impale an entire season if you're a player that's already seen almost half a season and millions of dollars in salary go swirling down the drain?

Likewise, if the union pushes back on some of those issues, would the league lose at least a partial season over who pays for transition costs? Why not, for instance, split the cost of the amnesty buyout?

Too often when these kinds of so-called motherhood issues have presented themselves, one side or the other has walked away in anger insisting that the other side isn't serious about doing a deal.

Could there be any more stupid response to not having something go your way?

We could spend, oh, a month or two talking about the missteps and the wonky strategies employed by the NHL's owners and, to a lesser degree, the players. But what is the point at this late hour? The past has played far too big a role in extending a needless and potentially devastating lockout; the players determined to right past wrongs and the owners somehow managing to treat these negotiations as they did almost 20 years ago. Go figure.

If there is a sign that at least the owners understand that the day of reckoning is at hand, it is that they did not immediately characterize this latest offer as some sort of "final offer" or a hill upon which anyone would be willing to die — an unfortunate characterization of the league's stand on capping salary length at five years apparently first uttered by Calgary owner Murray Edwards and then repeated for the press by deputy commissioner Bill Daly.

In fact, the league was reticent to even acknowledge they had made such an offer.

There was little in the way of characterization of Saturday's multiple phone calls: questions and answers. And as has been the case thus far, the less information being shared publicly, the more traction these talks seem to gather

And so it should be. With the finish line in sight, it would appear to be a good time to put all of the childishness and churlishness aside.

Fehr will have to decide just how far he can push the envelope without leaving everything in tatters, including his own reputation. Remember it was Fehr who, flanked by some of the game's most influential players, insisted the two sides were achingly close to a deal. If that is so, the league's latest offer represents an even greater narrowing of an already narrow gap.

The league, on the other hand, will have to resist its standard response at the first sign of push-back from the union, which is to pitch a fit or try and discredit Fehr.

It is, in short, time to think big picture for once in this odious process.

It's a game, people, something that most involved seem to have conveniently forgotten over the past months. It's time to play it. Before it's truly too late.

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NBCSports.com /World Juniors: Team Canada's Lipon suspended one game by IIHF

Joe Yerdon

Team Canada is going to be a bit shorthanded in the big opening round game against Team USA on Sunday.

The IIHF suspended forward J.C. Lipon for one game thanks to an elbow he delivered to the head of Slovakian forward Tomas Mikus. While Mikus wasn't hurt on the play, it appeared Lipon targeted his head while delivering a check. In international play, that's a major no-no and he was assessed a five-minute major and a game misconduct.

Lipon joins teammate Boone Jenner in the press box for the game against Team USA as Jenner will be serving the final game of his three-game suspension. Jenner's absence hasn't stopped Canada from scoring goals so far at Worlds as they've potted 15 goals in two games, both regulation wins.

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PHT Morning Skate: Sidney Crosby provides a charity surprise

Joe Yerdon

PHT's Morning Skate takes a look around the world of hockey to see what's happening and what we'll be talking about around the NHL world and beyond.

Leave it to Sidney Crosby to provide a little bit more juice to a charity game in his hometown of Cole Harbour. (The Chronicle Herald)

Curious: Ken Campbell says Donald Fehr is negotiating against himself and losing. (The Hockey News)

Former NHLer Louie DeBrusk says playing a short season will make for a tough transition. (Sportsnet)

At the very least, former Canadiens coach Jacques Demers believes in the Habs. (Montreal Gazette)

Today marks Day 105 of the NHL lockout. 19 players in NHL history have scored 105 points in a season. The last to do it? Dany Heatley with the Ottawa Senators in 2006-07.

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Report: Columbus and Winnipeg trade conferences in a shortened season

Joe Yerdon

The topic of realignment hasn't come up at all in CBA negotiations, but if a new deal is reached to save the season we might see two teams trade conferences.

Larry Brooks of the New York Post reports there's talk within the NHL of having the Columbus Blue Jackets and Winnipeg Jets trading spots for this year only pending future realignment. The benefit here during a possible 48-game schedule is on travel.

If the Jets start a shortened season in the Southeast Division once again, travel for them would be murderous over the course of the four or five month season. Columbus staying in the Central Division wouldn't be much better for them travel-wise and certainly wouldn't be helpful competitively.

On the upside, we'd get to have that awkward "Rick Nash returns to Columbus as a New York Ranger" game right away this season. There'd also be Sergei Bobrovsky's revenge match with Philadelphia to look forward to as well.

If it's just a one-season fix, it works out just fine. It cuts down on manic travel for a couple teams in awkward positions and opens the door for things to be fixed for good in the offseason.

Plus, as Brooks so bluntly put it, you're trading one non-playoff team for another one in the name of easing travel. Win-win situation.

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Report: NHL and players to talk Saturday, meet on Sunday

Joe Yerdon

After today's breaking news about the NHL making a new offer to the players in an attempt to end the lockout, the next question to follow was: When will they meet?

Gary Lawless of the Winnipeg Free Press reports the two sides will have a conference call tomorrow and aim to meet in New York City on Sunday in an effort to negotiate a new CBA.

The NHLPA held an internal conference call today to discuss the league's latest offer and there's clearly a lot to chew on with it. Getting the two sides back in the room to potentially put an end to this mess is the next step. Here's to hoping things stay civil this time around.

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NBCSports.com /NHL, NHLPA to have a committee for pretty much everything

Mike Halford

In what could be seen as an effort to improve the working relationship between players and owners (which isn't so hot right now), the latest CBA proposal — obtained on Friday by ESPN's Pierre LeBrun — includes a section dedicated to creating and improving NHL/NHLPA joint committees.

Here's a rundown of what's being proposed.

New

Owner-Player Relations Committee: Pretty self-explanatory. The league intends it to have "broad-based participation" from both owners and players, to "foster and establish better understanding and stronger working relationships."

Revenue Sharing Oversight Committee: Group will be in charge of overseeing the operation of sharing revenue, which is rather important given, y'know, the lockout.

Joint Health and Safety Committee: Again, pretty self-explanatory.

NHL/NHLPA Equipment Working Group: Interesting idea, and entirely separate from joint health and safety — this group will be designed to

"study, promulgate and enforce minimum standards for protective equipment utilized by NHL Players."

It'll be curious to see how this group works with the NHL's Hockey Operations department, including goalie equipment guru Kay Whitmore, who prior to the 2010-11 season made significant changes to goaltender equipment regulations:

Existing

Player/Club Competition Committee: This committee was established under the last CBA and is responsible for "making recommendations about rules and related issues to the NHL Board of Governors and the National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA) Executive Board."

Players and owners are represented by equal voting members, with the NHL proposing "greater consultation and interaction with the NHL General Managers' Committee."

Current GMs on the committee include Dallas' Joe Nieuwendyk, Nashville's David Poile, Carolina's Jim Rutherford and Tampa Bay's Steve Yzerman.

NHL/NHLPA Joint Owner-Player Broadcasting/Marketing Committee: Another group born out of the last CBA. The NHL is asking for a reconstitution of this committee to "consult and establish policy on League broadcasting and marketing matters, as well as other League business functions and initiatives."

NHL/NHLPA International Committee: Again, another group established under the last CBA. It was initially created to deal with things like the NHL Permiere games, IIHF World Championship participation, etc.

Under the new NHL proposal, the committee's scope will extend to "identifying, creating, exploiting and managing new international business opportunities," and having "an advisory role in planning and executing NHL events conducted outside of North America.

Perhaps most importantly, the league proposes the NHL and NHLPA to "participate as 50-50 partners" on the International Committee.

Notes

- No, there isn't any mention of a Party Planning Committee. Players and owners will be responsible for their own ice cream cakes.
- Yes, this post did set a record for most uses of the word "committee."

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NHL proposes all non-playoff teams get shot at No. 1 draft pick

Mike Halford

The annual NHL Entry Draft could be getting a major facelift.

That's one of the big revelations from the league's latest CBA offer, obtained by ESPN's Pierre LeBrun on Friday.

According to LeBrun's report, the NHL has proposed the implementation of a draft lottery in which "all non-Playoff teams compete for the opportunity to choose first overall."

Under the NHL's current format, only the bottom four teams (26th through 30th place) are eligible to receive the first overall draft pick.

This system has been in place for 18 years, designed partly in response to accusations the Ottawa Senators "tanked" the end of the 1992 season to select Alexander Daigle first overall in 1993.

For more on how the current system works, here's James Mirtle of the Globe and Mail:

The lottery system is pretty complicated, but the basics are that teams can only move up a maximum of four spots and down a maximum of one spot.

Only one team "wins" the lottery – everyone else moves based on the team that won.

That leaves every team with a maximum of only three different spots they can pick in.

As such, the lottery doesn't change much in terms of overall landscape. Teams that bottom out end up at the top of the draft, and teams that narrowly missed the playoffs are stuck drafting in the teens.

What the NHL is proposing falls more in line with the NBA Draft Lottery, in which all 14 non-playoff teams have a shot at the first overall pick.

This can lead to some wild results, like in 1993 — that year, Orlando won the No. 1 pick in the draft despite finishing the 1992 season with a 41-41 record and holding just a 1.52 percent chance of winning the lottery.

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NHL confirms making "new, comprehensive proposal" to NHLPA

Mike Halford

NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly has confirmed the league made a new collective bargaining agreement offer to the players' union.

Daly's statement, courtesy NHL.com:

In light of media reports this morning, I can confirm that we delivered to the Union a new, comprehensive proposal for a successor CBA late yesterday afternoon.

We are not prepared to discuss the details of our proposal at this time. We are hopeful that once the Union's staff and negotiating committee have had an opportunity to thoroughly review and consider our new proposal, they will share it with the players.

We want to be back on the ice as soon as possible.

Some of the main points of the NHL's latest offer:

- The NHL is now willing to allow a variance of 10% in contracts, up from its previous offer of 5%.
- \$300 million in Make Whole or, as NHLPA boss Donald Fehr prefers to call it, "transition payments" is still on the table.
- The salary cap for 2013-14 would be \$60 million.
- Each team would be allowed to buy out one contract prior to 2013-14 without it impacting the salary cap. However, the money would still come out of the players' share of hockey-related revenues.
- The proposed CBA is still a 10-year deal and an "extremely detailed proposal," according to the Minneapolis Star Tribune's Michael Russo.

Courtesy ESPN's Pierre LeBrun, here are the full details.

Curiously, Daly's confirmation comes shortly after Helene Elliott of the LA Times reported the following:

It would take "a new move or idea" for NHL talks to re-start, league says. At the moment nothing planned.

— Helene Elliott (@helenenothelen) December 27, 2012

That came on Thursday, the same day the NHL submitted its proposal to the union.

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NBCSports.com /Let the buyout debates begin

Jason Brough

Unless the NHL ends up pulling its latest CBA offer from the table, it appears there will be some form of compliance buyouts to help the transition to a lower salary cap in 2013-14.

Under the league's new proposal, each team would be allowed one buyout that wouldn't count against the cap; however, the money would come out of the players' share (which the union may take issue with).

The NBA put a similar clause in its recently signed CBA. Notably, the "amnesty" provision allowed the Magic to bid adieu to Gilbert Arenas and the Knicks to rid themselves of Chauncey Billups' contract (so they could afford Tyson Chandler).

Compliance buyouts will be most welcomed by the NHL's big spenders. The league reportedly wants a \$60 million salary cap next season (which again, the union may take issue with), significantly lower than the current \$70.2 million.

Among the potential buyout candidates:

- --- Scott Gomez (Montreal)
- --- Wade Redden (NY Rangers)
- Mike Komisarek (Toronto)
- —- Keith Ballard (Vancouver)
- —- Matt Stajan (Calgary)

Buying out players with long-term contracts is less likely, as those players will still need to be paid their salaries according to the buyout formula. (Unless there's some sort of exception that allows a team to assume part of the salary of a bought out player.)

Related: \$60 million cap? Here are 10 teams that could be in trouble

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NBCSports.com /NHLPA reportedly working on counteroffer

Jason Brough

We said earlier it was hard to imagine the players would accept the NHL's new CBA offer in its entirety. And apparently they won't.

The NHLPA is holding a conference call this afternoon to update its members; however, Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos reports a counteroffer is already in the works.

It's likely this roller-coaster still has a few loops and corkscrews to go before we learn if there's going to be a season or not. The NHL has canceled games through Jan. 14, so time remains for more rejections and posturing.

Fun!

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NBCSports.com /Jamison reportedly traveled to Middle East in search of Coyotes investors

Jason Brough

Finding investors to put their money into the perpetually money-losing Phoenix Coyotes has not been easy for prospective buyer Greg Jamison.

How tough has it been? According to the Globe and Mail's David Shoalts, Jamison explored using something called the EB-5 program, which provides foreign nationals with a green card for investing money (typically a minimum of \$1 million) in the United States.

Ultimately Jamison abandoned the EB-5 avenue, but not before he reportedly traveled as far as the Middle East in his search for backers.

"I've been at this 18 months, I've looked at everything," Jamison told the Globe and Mail. "I'm aware of the [EB-5] program and what it can do. We did discuss it, but we're not using it as part of our program, no."

Who exactly comprises Jamison's potential ownership group has been a mystery. The former Sharks executive has declined to share that information, even with the City of Glendale which recently signed the controversial arena management deal that calls for \$320 million to be paid to Jamison's group over a 20-year term.

Jamison hopes to close on his purchase by the end of January. Whether he actually gets it done, as usual we'll have to wait and see.

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NBCSports.com /Briere signs extension with Berlin

Jason Brough

Danny Briere has signed a contract extension with Eisbaren Berlin that, unless the NHL returns, will keep the Flyers' forward in Germany for the rest of the season.

Briere leads the Polar Bears with 33 points in 20 games and, according to his agent, Pat Brisson, has had no issues with the organization.

"They have been treating him first class," said Brisson, per CSNPhilly.com.

On Jan. 5, Berlin will play an outdoor game in Nuremberg against the Thomas Sabo Ice Tigers at the 50,000-seat Frankenstadion.

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