

Commentary

Bettman Busting NHL Players Union

NHL fans and players might be surprised to learn that Lucifer is not commissioner Gary Bettman's middle name.

Neither is Napoleon, Hitler, Hagar the Horrible, or Darth Vader. But Gary B. Bettman may be remembered as sports' biggest tyrant.

Bettman lately has pulled more goon tactics than the 1974-75 Philadelphia Flyers. And all because the league has been without a collective bargaining agreement since Sept. 15, 1993.

The lockout was his latest in a series of hostile moves aimed at the NHL Players Association. The idea of a lockout was first proposed in August for the start of training camp in early September.

No training camp lockout occurred. But Bettman ordered teams not to pay players' expenses to get to the camps, forcing players to pay their own way.

And yet the players all showed up for camp on time, the exception being those involved in contract disputes, like Chicago Blackhawks goaltender Ed Belfour.

The NHLPA then pledged not to strike during the season or playoffs if the owners wouldn't lock them out. But Bettman still postponed the start of the season two days before it was supposed to start, setting Friday as the deadline for the season to go on as planned, should the two sides reach a new agreement.

But as of Tuesday, the players have put up an offer for a new agreement in an attempt to start the season Saturday.



JOHN SANTANA

One thing is apparent. The players want to play. Unlike Bettman, they seem to realize hockey is on the verge of a national breakthrough, and could surpass the NBA in popularity this season.

The league just signed a new network television contract with Fox, something they haven't had since the 1970s. Sales of NHL merchandise is rising. These developments point to a bright future for the 26-team league.

It also hasn't hurt that American-based teams have won the Stanley Cup three of the last four years.

The fact that the NHL is gaining popularity wasn't lost on NBA commissioner David Stern, who bragged last Wednesday at a news conference that his league has never had a strike or lockout and that they'd start the season on time.

If Oliver Stone made a film on the lockout, he'd probably suggest a conspiracy between Bettman and Stern, because Bettman used to be senior vice president and legal counsel for the NBA.

Owners and players agree on minor issues, like reducing the number of rounds in the entry draft, but they haven't been able to agree on how to distribute revenue to small market teams.

The players feel the owners are trying to impose a salary cap. The owners want changes in the free agency system, and a revenue redistribution plan, which the players say will serve as a ceiling on salaries.

The players latest proposal was rejected by the owners, putting the 1994-95 season in jeopardy.

What the owners, with Bettman's encouragement, are doing is destroying the solidarity of the NHLPA. The actions by

the owners and Bettman are the best example of union-busting this side of the Culinary Union strike at the Frontier Hotel, which has dragged on for three years.

Average NHL salaries, although rising, are comparatively low. The league reports the average salary this season is \$560,000, nearly half the average baseball salary.

Unlike baseball, the NHLPA doesn't have much of a strike fund from licensing revenue, says an agent who represents players in both hockey and baseball. That means the players haven't received much compensation from their union.

The players have probably given in, because they fear not having money to support themselves and their families. Only an elite few, such as Wayne Gretzky, have received any kind of bonus money.

Bettman's union-busting shows no class on his part. He didn't need to do what he did.

He could have taken the players offer of a no-lockout, no-strike to start the season on time, under the condition of compulsory, immediate negotiations which he could have supervised.

Bettman could have acted as a moderator who could have brought the two sides together. But instead, he has established a clear division between the owners and players.

The 26 NHL teams may still play a full 84 game schedule, but the player-owner relationship may forever be damaged. Why should a player trust an owner after the last two weeks?

—John Santana is a sports writer at The Rebel Yell.

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"Losing P.J. hurt us in the second half because he does a lot for us up and down the line," Barto said.

Freshman Damon Bradshaw agreed.

"That's the way the whole year has gone," Bradshaw said. "Losing P.J. hurt. He does a lot of attacking on the right side for us. Good teams break you down, and UCLA is a good team."

While the Rebels had it together in the first half, the loss of Roberts, and a goal by the Bruins' Justin Selander, sent the team reeling in the second half.

"I thought UNLV was more disciplined in the first half and we weren't controlling the midfield as much as we wanted to," UCLA's Ante Razov said.

Razov scored at 62:35, when he beat Rebel goalkeeper Dan Abdalla one-on-one.

"The ball was cleared by the defense, Frye headed it and I went to the post and when I looked back I was surprised there were no defenders," Razov said. "All I had to do was beat the goalie and I had an easy placement. That doesn't happen very often."

Barto felt his team played well in the first half, but laid down in the second.

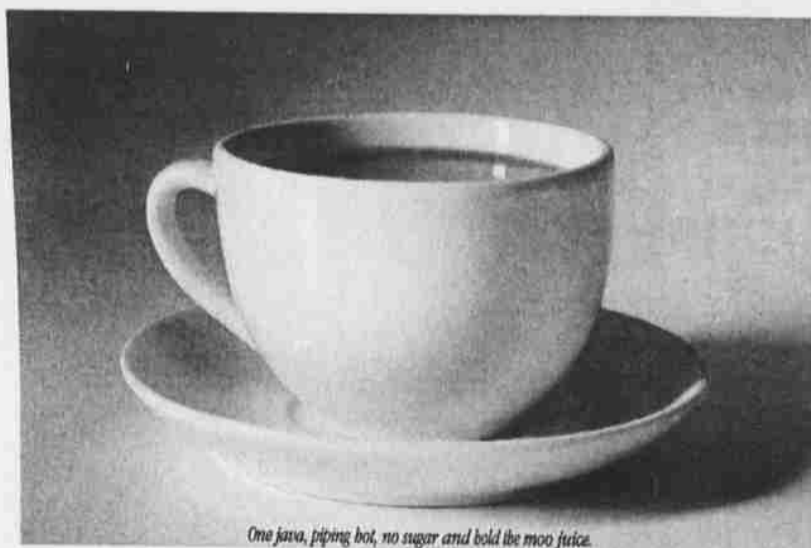
"In the first half, we did what we wanted to do, but they scored a great goal," he said. "The other team scored what we allowed them in the second half. I didn't see them create anything. But good teams put the ball away and UCLA is good team."

The Rebels fared much better against UC Irvine, with the offense showing the ability to score. UNLV was paced by goals from Bradshaw, Coby Holt and Michael DuHaney.

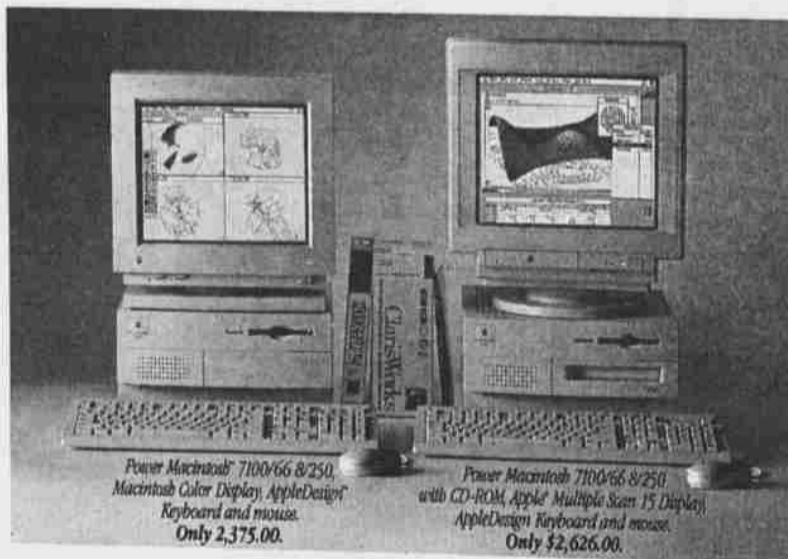
"We just have to concentrate on scoring," Bradshaw said. "After we put one in, I think the second one will come and we just have to keep scoring."

The Rebels are on the road to face Mountain Pacific Sports Federation rivals Cal State Fullerton on Friday and San Diego State Sunday.

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