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Cross about lacrosse lockout

NLL can't afford to lose a season, and it will be the owners' fault that they will



NICK FROST

Sports Commentary

When the NHL made the decision to cancel the 2004/05 season after a lengthy and well-publicized lockout between team owners and the NHLPA over a new Collective Bargaining Agreement, fans of the game could at least be sure of one thing: the league would come back and be fully functional at some point. However, the same can't be said for fans of the National Lacrosse League (NLL), who may very well have seen the nail driven into their proverbial coffin after league owners decided to cancel the 2007/08 season over their failure to reach a new CBA with the players.

It seemed in the past few years as though the NLL was developing into a stronger and more respectable league after suffering through nearly a decade of failed expansion into large markets like Anaheim, Ottawa, and Vancouver, as well as a lack of exposure to both Canadian and American audiences. As of last season, they were maintaining a strong 13-team base—with plans to expand into Boston in 2008 and other North American markets further down the road—and had TV deals in both Canada and the US solidified. It looked like they were well on the way to shaking off the reputation of being a fringe league.

Now, the league has gone and jeopardized its current fanbase by taking away their ability to observe the product, and while that might not hinder one of the "big four" sports leagues

to any great extent, the NLL isn't even close to big—their fanbase is maybe one-third the size of the NHL's. There's no eloquent way of putting this: everyone involved in this situation has completely fucked things up.

As is the case with any cancellation, lockout, or strike in professional sports, the blame lies on both sides of the fence. The brunt of it in this situation, though, has to be placed on the owners. Their main negotiation tactic appears to be guilting the players into giving in.

It seems like the owners are happier sitting in the corner and pouting, while the league loses what little revenue it was generating, than actually trying to work with the players.

The owners left the players with a "take it or leave it" deadline two and a half months before the season was scheduled to commence, leaving no doors open for possible negotiations anytime soon with the players, who seemed eager to try and hash out a deal. It seems like the owners are happier sitting in the corner and pouting, while the league loses what little revenue it was generating rather than actually trying to work with the players.

That said, the Professional Lacrosse Players' Association (PLPA) hasn't exactly done the finest job of handling this mess either. Rather than putting the decision to accept or reject the owners' proposal in the

hands of all players represented by the PLPA—thus giving them a voice in the matter—the decision was made solely by player representatives from each team. While the player reps are generally more educated on the business side of the game, some players—like Rochester Knighthawks defender Luke Forget, who spoke on the matter in a recent interview with the *Woodstock Sentinel-Review*—believe that if all players had been given a vote, the CBA would have been passed and the season would have gone ahead.

Aside from the fact that, as a sports fan, the whole idea of a season cancellation in any sports league annoys me, this one infuriates me even more because of how stupid and pointless it is. NLL players don't make very much money to begin with; in fact, the average current player salary amounts to \$14 500, which for some of the players is as much as they make at their second jobs outside of the NLL just to earn a decent living. I understand that most of these guys have families that they need to support, but do they really think that sacrificing an entire season's worth of money to likely end up making a few thousand more is really going to amount to any significant benefit? Most of them could probably make slightly higher dollar figures working outside of the pro-lacrosse world altogether.

As for the owners, to take such a lax position on an issue involving financial stability and a league that can barely stand on its own two feet is just irresponsible. In this case, for the greater good of the NLL, both sides need to sit back down at the table later tonight, stop being stubborn and childish, and just get this thing done so that the 2007/08 season can be revived. Otherwise, the league may suffer an untimely demise.



FILEPHOTO: MONICA LEON-QUINTERO

GET THE LOWDOWN Emily Bolduc (right) and her Pandas teammates took on Waterloo on Friday night to headline the first night of Pandas Hoopfest. Alberta won 74-64 that night, and also defeated teams from Bishop's and Concordia.