Mariners' new stadium situation takes turn for the good

■ BASEBALL: Stadium's chances are brightening, according to Washington lawmakers

OLYMPIA (AP) — A major roadblock to the call for a special legislative session to save the Mariners — a GOP bid for an override vote on the governor's tax-cut vetoes — appeared to be crumbling Wednesday.

And while state leaders had not produced a unified stadium-financing proposal in four days of closed-door talks, Gov. Mike Lowry said he hoped they would have something to take to the Legislature by Friday. A fifth day of negotiations was scheduled Thursday.

The override question was addressed Wednesday by Attorney General Christine Gregoire, who issued a formal opinion saying lawmakers would not forfeit their right to an override vote if they waited until the regular session in January.

The opinion addressed concerns that the state constitution requires override votes to occur in the session immediately following the vetoes.

"This is good news," said House Speaker Clyde Ballard, R-East Wenatchee.

Legislative Republicans had said there may be no way to win the party's backing for a special session to consider state stadium aid without a concurrent vote to override Gov. Mike Lowry's vetoes of $265 million in business and property tax cuts.

Lowry and Senate Democrats said there would be no special session if Republicans insisted on forcing override votes.

Mariners owners have said they will put the team up for sale Oct. 30 if there's no action on a stadium bailout.

Last month — just as the Mariners began the steamroller performance that produced the first AL West title in the team's 19-year history — King County voters narrowly defeated a sales-tax increase to raise $240 million for a new retractable-roof stadium and Kingdome repairs.

Ballard and Senate Majority Leader Marcus Gaspard, D-Puyallup, said the leaders are still discussing possible financial packages.

Lowry said he is increasingly inclined to support bonding for the state's $120 million share of the bailout. Ballard also expressed interest in bonding, but Gaspard advocates dipping into the state's nearly $700 million surplus account.

Ballard said he opposes using the reserves, which he contends should be "returned to the taxpayers" next year as tax cuts.

But floating bonds could be politically difficult because the issue would require a 60 percent vote of each house.

King County and the Mariners would have to come up with the rest of the estimated $285 million required to build the outdoor stadium. The Mariners already have pledged $45 million for the project.

Lowry said he wants the Legislature to act by mid-October or earlier to allow the King County Council to approve a local tax increase for its share of the cost. Among those levies would be a hotel-motel tax, an increase in the car-rental tax and an admissions tax.

Even with agreement among leaders, a special session is not a done deal. There remains skepticism, if not outright opposition, among the rank and file — especially in the Republican House caucus — and a special session could be scrapped if the proposal is doomed.

"I can tell you, nobody is beating down my doors to build a new stadium, and I think other Eastern Washington legislators will tell you the same thing," said Rep. Larry Sheahan, R-Rosalia.

Sheahan expressed sympathy, however, for Western Washington colleagues.

"They're really under pressure," he said. "They're getting a lot of calls."

Lowry said the endeavor is exactly what a legislature should be pursuing.

"I believe the legislative leaders really think that this is a family-values issue and important to the quality of life in Washington," he said.

The governor also said it's an economic issue. "When companies are deciding whether to locate here, they look to see if baseball is here," he said.

Despite the most successful season in their history, the Mariners expect to lose $30 million this year, bringing losses to $67 million since new owners bought the club 3½ years ago.

Owners blame the red ink on the configuration and lack of amenities in the multipurpose Kingdome.

Mariners Chairman John Ellis has never waivered in his demands of an outdoor ballpark with a retractable roof, a grass playing field, luxury boxes and club seats.

Oregon stopped in final round

■ GOLF: The men's golf team can't overcome several 80-plus scores in the third round

By Trevor Kearney
Sports Editor

Hurt by a horrible third round, the Oregon men's golf team finished ninth in the 21-team field at the Wolf Pack Classic in Washoe Valley, Nev.

The Ducks went into the final round of play tied with Wyoming for seventh place with a score of 602, but only one Oregon golfer — redshirt freshman Derek Croskrey — finished with a sub-80 score as the Ducks finished with a team score of 927.

Sophomore Jeff Barney led the Ducks, but he too succumbed in the third round and shot an 81 to finish with a combined score of 227. Going into Wednesday, Barney had an impressive score of 146, good for a tie with Washington's Bob Conrad, who shot a 2-under-par 70 in the opening round.

Croskrey's 78-stroke performance in the final round gave him an overall score of 231, good for the Ducks' second-best performance of the tournament. Junior Joel Stock was five strokes back at 236, while freshman Andrew Tredway finished with a score of 237.

Sophomore Chris Cone, who was second among the Oregon contingent entering the last round, shot a 14-over-par 86 to finish with a combined score of 238.

In team competition, Augusta and Charleston tied with team scores of 903, but Augusta won the sudden-death playoff to take the tournament. Nevada finished 10 strokes back with a team score of 913, while Washington finished with a 915-stroke performance and Pacific recorded a 919-stroke outing.

Next up for the Ducks is the Oregon Golf Fund-raiser on Friday at the Eugene Country Club at 12:30 p.m.