

Pohlad prepares to sell Twins

Minnesota Twins owner Carl Pohlad expects to sign a final agreement to sell the team soon

By Ronald Blum
The Associated Press

PHOENIX — Minnesota Twins owner Carl Pohlad says a draft of a final agreement to sell the team to a North Carolina group has been prepared and that he expects to sign it, a Minnesota newspaper reported today.

"When we sign the contract — the definitive contract — which will be very soon, that's a deal," Pohlad told the Saint Paul Pioneer Press.

The Twins moved closer Tuesday to finding a new home in North Carolina when baseball appointed a five-man committee to guide the team through the sport's relocation rules.

"Carl Pohlad has tried everything to stay in Minnesota," acting commissioner Bud Selig said before Tuesday's expansion draft. "It's very frustrating."

The Minnesota Legislature last week defeated a proposal to finance a new ballpark, and Pohlad has an agreement with North Carolina businessman Don Beaver to negotiate a sale unless stadium financing is approved by Nov. 30.

"It's all changed as a result of the Legislature turning down the stadium," Pohlad told the Pioneer Press. "We have an agreement, we have a firm agreement... We have to live up to that."

If he buys the Twins, Beaver has said he would apply to move the team to North Carolina following the 1998 season.

"The deadline is a very real and significant one," Selig said. "If

there's no new ballpark, baseball will not survive in Minneapolis."

But Minneapolis lawyer Clark Griffith, who made an offer to buy the team, said nothing will happen soon, if ever.

"I happen to think this has a long way to go, and I don't think the team's going to go anywhere," Griffith said.

He and a group of investors have made an offer to buy the team. The offer was reported to be about \$80 million. Griffith said he had increased the amount but declined to say by how much.

He has corresponded, but not spoken, with Pohlad, who has said his offer is too low.

"If Carl continues to ignore these things, major league baseball will deal with them," Griffith said.

Selig will head the committee, which also includes AL president Gene Budig, NL president Len Coleman, New York Mets president Fred Wilpon and Colorado Rockies chairman Jerry McMorris.

"They'll help and assist in all the relocation guidelines if that's the situation we're going to be in," Selig said.

Minnesota's ballpark and Pohlad's desire to sell were discussed Monday night by baseball's ruling executive council, but no action was taken.

"We really don't want to give up on Minnesota," McMorris said. "But the bottom line is you have to do what you have to do. They're running out of options. It's not a problem we can continue to duck."

Under major League Baseball regulations, the next step would

be for Pohlad and Beaver to reach a sale agreement and submit it to the sport's ownership committee.

"The American League has no choice but to direct the Twins to move forward with the sale of the club," Budig said.

Any sale must be approved by 11 of 14 AL owners and nine of 16 NL owners. In recent years owners have taken from six to 12 months to approve sales.

"I believe the people of Minnesota want the Twins," Budig said, an indication that additional maneuvering might take place to keep the team from moving. "Without question, they have proven their commitment to major league baseball over the years. I do not believe that the Legislature is reflecting that view of the fans."

In the past, Selig has preferred that teams not move and that local buyers be found. That doesn't appear to be the case this time.

"Major league baseball continues to believe that the Twins cannot remain in Minnesota without a new ballpark," Budig said. "One cannot expect any owner of a major league baseball franchise to lose money indefinitely."

Pohlad said he expects Beaver to submit an application to buy the team, saying it's "just a formality now." Tim Newman, a spokesman for Beaver's organization, said Tuesday he expects sale talks to move forward.

"I really wouldn't want to speculate on a timetable because it depends on what they lay out to us," Newman said.

No baseball team has moved since the Washington Senators became the Texas Rangers after the 1971 season. It's unclear if North Carolina would finance a stadium.



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Ski resorts look to El Niño for help

Oregon ski areas hope the ocean-warming trend will help attract more skiers to the mountains

By Jeff Barnard
The Associated Press

GRANTS PASS — Oregon ski resorts are hoping El Niño will let enough snowstorms through to the Cascades and Siskiyou to give their new efforts to attract more skiers a chance to work.

"It looks like the storms are backed up and things are starting to cook," said Gene Landsmann, marketing director for the Mount Ashland Ski Area.

"Most forecasters we have heard are comparing this to the 1982-83 season, and that season for us was great," said Tiia Sumera, spokeswoman for Mount Bachelor.

The ocean-warming trend known as El Niño tends to split the jetstream, sending storms north and south of Oregon during winter. That has led state climatologist George Taylor to predict above-average precipitation for the first half of winter, but a drying trend for the second half.

Once they get the snow, Hoodoo Ski Bowl will be concentrating on getting first-time skiers to come back for more.

"It's tougher," to attract people to ski resorts than in the past, said Mike Obymako, general manager of Hoodoo Ski Bowl in the Cascade Range near Sisters. "There are more things that compete for the time and dollars."

That's why Hoodoo is concentrating this season on its new beginner chairlift, the start of a \$9 million, 12-year expansion plan to boost attendance from 50,000 people a year to 125,000.

With a guarantee of free lessons for people who don't graduate to the next level after their first day and a discount on the Club Hoodoo discount card, the ski area is trying to make it attractive for beginners to move up the mountain.

"We are not unlike the industry in that we have a pretty significant fallout after that first visit," Obymako said. "This is geared toward skier retention, and hopefully we will get people back for that third or fourth visit."

Mount Bachelor, Oregon's biggest ski area with 600,000 skiers and snowboarders a year, has launched a marketing campaign featuring the su-

perhero Bachelor Guy, who skis as well as boards.

"This year's theme is if you follow him, he will show you where to live life out loud," Sumera said.

Turning up the volume includes a new high-speed quad chair on the Summit run to the top of the mountain and new terrain in the snowboard park.

The Egan Lodge in West Village has been converted into a ski-in, ski-out demonstration center where people can buy rides on the latest gear from Dynastar, such as easy-turning parabolic skis and racing skis.

Mount Ashland is still a couple years away from a major expansion, but this year the resort will offer free skiing for kids 8 and younger, as well as parabolic skis for rent.

With the skiing and snowboarding population remaining flat for the past decade at around 52 million, the user-friendly parabolic skis offer a chance to boost the numbers, Landsmann said.

"It really gets people interested again in skiing," he said.

Overall, Oregon gets about 1.2 million skier visits a year, worth about \$160 million, according to the Oregon Ski Industry Association.

With the Palmer Snowfield at 8,500 feet up Mount Hood, Timberline offers year-round skiing, but it's still waiting for winter storms to dump enough snow on the lower slopes that offer most of the runs.

This year Timberline recognizes that skiing and boarding are not what everyone wants when they head to the mountain. The ski area is opening a snowplay hill, with inner tubes for rent. The nearby Mount Hood Ski Bowl is upping the ante with a new automated inner tube lift.

"What that does is open our market 100 percent," said Mount Hood Ski Bowl spokeswoman Karen Norton.

"A lot of that demand is amongst the increasing minority populations," said Timberline spokesman Jon Tullis.

Taking a lead from the espresso shops, Timberline and Mount Hood Ski Bowl are both offering a card that rewards people with a free lift ticket on their 10th visit.

"We decided to use that as a simple turnkey vehicle to both promote frequency, but also reward loyalty," Tullis said.

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