

NBA settlement remains unfinished as season nears

Rumors about trades and retirements loom as the settlement continues

By Chris Sheridan
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — With opening night less than 2 1/2 weeks away, the NBA lockout settlement still hasn't been completed.

By the time the lawyers are finished, who knows? Maybe Dennis Rodman will be unretired and Antonio McDyess will finally have made up his mind.

The laborious task of reducing the lockout settlement into written form dragged on today. After meeting all night and settling the most contentious issue, lawyers for the league and the union were still haggling over a few last sticking points.

Both sides seemed to think an agreement could be reached later today, which would clear the way for deals to commence and training camps to open before the weekend.

In the meantime, the rumors kept coming and the plots kept twisting as teams maneuvered to get ready for the scheduled Feb. 5 start of the season.

"It'll get done. It always gets done," agent David Falk said. "This just gives us more time to

talk to people and refine our numbers."

The main sticking point between the sides had been whether the new middle-class exception can be used for a three-year contract (the league's contention) or a six-year contract (the union's contention).

The union won that argument, but a final snag developed over the league's insistence upon having discipline authority over agents involved in salary cap circumvention. Another snag concerned whether bonus money would be counted in trade calculations.

Rod Strickland, meanwhile, was miffed at the offer being made by the Washington Wizards. The Washington Post said the Wizards were offering three years and \$30 million, with two additional years non-guaranteed, and had given Strickland a deadline of midnight tonight.

"I don't think he'll be back here," Falk told The Associated Press today. "We're trying to get him to New York. He loves it that they have (Latrell) Sprewell, Allan Houston and Larry Johnson there, and he thinks they can win a championship. I'd like to get him there so Patrick (Ewing) can win a championship."

Falk was exploring other op-

tions for Strickland, including several sign-and-trade deals that would send last season's NBA assist leader to another team. He said four or five teams were making bids, but refused to name any other than the Knicks.

Rodman added a strange subplot to Tuesday's events as his agent, Dwight Manley, announced that Rodman was retiring. Hours later, the league's leading rebounder for the past seven seasons said he was more in a state of "limbo" than retirement.

McDyess put off until today a decision on where he'll play — Denver or Phoenix, and several signs seemed to be pointing to the Nuggets.

The Tom Gugliotta rumors were strong, too, with the Nuggets, Suns and Lakers all interested. A source close to the Lakers said Los Angeles was offering Elden Campbell, Eddie Jones and rookie Sam Jacobsen to the Timberwolves in a sign-and-trade deal for Gugliotta.

"It defies logic, in my opinion," Suns owner Jerry Colangelo said of the deliberations concerning McDyess. "We think this is a great spot for him. He seemed very happy here. We love him as a young guy and a future star in this league. But a lot of things have happened this offseason."

The Nuggets also were wondering whether they would be spurned by Gugliotta in the event that McDyess stays in Phoenix. If so, they were expected to look to sign free-agent center Vlade Divac.

No event symbolized the day's craziness like the "retirement" of Rodman.

"I'm not going to play this year," Rodman told Fox Sports News. "I am in limbo, but I'm not going to say I'm retired."

That's not how his former coach heard it. In a strange twist earlier in the day, Chuck Daly of the Orlando Magic said he heard Rodman was traded to the New York Knicks for Buck Williams — a rumor that was quickly shot down.

Also Tuesday, it was learned that John Starks and Chris Mills are the players who will be traded from the Knicks to the Golden State Warriors for Latrell Sprewell. Word of the Sprewell trade got out Monday night, just a few hours after another major trade was revealed — Scottie Pippen going from the Chicago Bulls to the Houston Rockets.

The Bulls also have sign-and-trade deals worked out for Luc Longley and Steve Kerr.

Colangelo confirmed that the Suns will trade three of the five players they have under contract

— Mark Bryant, Martin Muursepp and Bubba Wells — for Longley.

In another agreed-upon deal, the Seattle SuperSonics were set to send center Jim McIlvaine to the New Jersey Nets for veteran forwards Michael Cage and Don MacLean.

The Utah Jazz were expected to sign Nuggets free-agent forward Johnny Newman, who would take the place of free agent Chris Morris. The Jazz also went looking for another big man after learning that Greg Foster fractured an ankle. Utah was believed to have spoken to Chicago about a sign-and-trade deal involving Bill Wennington, although no trade agreement was reached.

The Miami Heat and Golden State Warriors, who couldn't agree on a Sprewell deal, nonetheless continued to discuss several multi-player deals. Heat coach Pat Riley was thought to have interest in reuniting with Starks, and a deal was being discussed that would send Brent Barry, Terry Mills and Duane Causwell to the Warriors for Clarence Weatherspoon, Tony Delk and Felton Spencer.

There were reports of a possible Starks-Barry deal, but it would not work salary-cap wise under the league's complicated trade rules.

Colorado hires Barnett for top job

Barnett, an assistant for eight seasons under McCartney, will return as head coach

By John Mossman
The Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — Gary Barnett, who led a turnaround of the Northwestern football program that included an appearance in the Rose Bowl, was hired as coach at Colorado on Wednesday.

Colorado athletic director Dick Tharp said Barnett's hiring is subject to the approval of the university's board of regents, which will meet on Thursday morning to discuss the matter.

If the board approves the hiring, as expected, Barnett would be introduced during a press conference on Friday.

Barnett, 52, planned to meet with the current Colorado team on Thursday, as well as assemble his staff and familiarize himself with the status of Colorado's recruiting effort.

"I'm pleased to bring forward to the board an individual who is deeply committed to young peo-

ple and the University of Colorado," Tharp said Wednesday.

Barnett, returning to the school where he was an assistant for eight seasons under Bill McCartney, replaces Rick Neuheisel, who left Colorado on Jan. 9 to coach Washington at \$1 million a year.

Barnett was Tharp's original choice last week, but when negotiations broke down, the Buffaloes turned to Denver Broncos offensive coordinator Gary Kubiak. Kubiak turned down the offer on Monday, and Tharp renewed his campaign to woo Barnett, contacting the coach in Houston where he was on a recruiting trip.

Barnett had nine years remaining on an 11-year contract he signed with Northwestern in 1996. An expensive buyout clause in his contract apparently was a stumbling block in the original talks with Colorado.

In seven seasons at Northwestern, Barnett compiled a 35-45-1 record, including 3-9 in 1998. He took over a perennial cellar-dweller, however, and guided the team to two conference titles and a Rose Bowl appearance after the 1995 season.

Before Barnett arrived, Northwestern failed to win more than four games in a season since 1971.

The Wildcats won only eight games in Barnett's first three seasons, but the following year he led them to a 10-2 mark, including a 41-32 loss to Southern California in the Rose Bowl.

The Wildcats went 9-3 the following season, which ended with a 48-28 loss to Tennessee in the Citrus Bowl.

Northwestern returned to its losing ways the last two years. The school also was rocked by a sports betting scandal in which four former Wildcats football players were indicted Dec. 3, accused of lying about their gambling activities. Barnett was not implicated.

Barnett has been a hot coaching commodity in recent years. His name was mentioned in connection with openings at Georgia, Texas, UCLA, Notre Dame and Oklahoma.

His only other head coaching job was at Fort Lewis, a Division II school in Durango, Colo., where he had an 8-11-1 record in 1982-83.

ident Boris Yeltsin.

"I still believe I can be a value to the organization," Walsh said. "I certainly have the health and energy — of course you've heard Boris say the same thing — to sustain my efforts."

With the 49ers facing a salary cap crunch — they're a projected \$24 million over next season's limit — Walsh said he and his staff face major challenges in holding the roster together.

He took pains to say he was there to complement the efforts of coach Steve Mariucci, signed to a new five-year contract last week, and praised him as one of the finest coaches in the league. San Francisco went 12-4 this season and beat Green Bay in a wild card playoff before losing to Atlanta in the divisional round.

per Bowl victories in the 1980s and had an uncomfortable year-long stint under George Seifert as a consultant in 1996 in which his suggestions were routinely ignored.

"I just couldn't return to the San Francisco 49ers in a subordinate role, and I think that's understandable," Walsh said. "Not that I haven't worked well with others or for others. I did that for George Seifert for one year. But the role has changed, where I can really, truly express my beliefs and implement those beliefs."

During a wide-ranging news conference, the 67-year-old Walsh alternately portrayed himself as a mentor for the team's young executives and coaches, a personnel guru and iron-fisted decision-maker in the mold of Russian Pres-

NCAA questioned in discrimination lawsuit

The NCAA waits to find out if it's subject to federal discrimination laws

By Anne Gearan
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A lawsuit drafted by a rookie law student angry that she was denied a spot on her college volleyball team will help the Supreme Court answer whether the NCAA is subject to federal discrimination laws.

The NCAA told the court Wednesday that a key anti-bias law guaranteeing federal protection against sex discrimination in most schools does not apply to it.

"The NCAA is an association of its members and its members ... receive federal money. The NCAA does not," argued the tax-exempt organization's lawyer, John G. Roberts Jr.

Roberts said a federal appeals court was wrong when it ruled that the NCAA is an indirect recipient of federal aid because of the dues it collects from its 1,200 member schools.

The federal law known as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 applies only to educational programs receiving federal money.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule in Renee Smith's case by summer. If the court allows her to continue her lawsuit, the NCAA could be on the hook in a host of other discrimination lawsuits based on race or disability, both sides have said.

The NCAA argues that individual universities are fair game for discrimination complaints, but said it is a step removed.

"You don't just follow the money," Roberts argued. Smith, 26, sued in federal

court after the NCAA said she was ineligible for the volleyball teams at two schools where she did postgraduate work.

"I want to establish a precedent, so other intercollegiate athletes don't have to start at zero," Smith said outside the court building Wednesday.

The NCAA first judged her ineligible in 1993, based on the sports organization's rules. Although Smith had two years of eligibility remaining after her early graduation from St. Bonaventure in upstate New York, she lost them when she moved to Hofstra in Hempstead, N.Y., for graduate school, the NCAA said.

The NCAA refused to grant Smith a waiver.

Smith tried again when she moved on to law school at the University of Pittsburgh in 1995. Again, the NCAA denied her a waiver.

Smith sued in 1996, after completing her first year of law school, alleging that the NCAA was more inclined to grant waivers to male student athletes.

Her lawyer, Carter Phillips, argued that the NCAA ought to be subject to the same anti-discrimination rules as its member universities.

"You can't stop at the federal funds recipient" such as a university, Phillips told the court. "You have to go beyond that."

The NCAA claims it actually grants waivers to women more often than men. The raw numbers of waivers are much higher for men because far more men ask for them, the NCAA said.

But the Supreme Court is not deciding whether the NCAA does or does not favor male athletes — only whether Smith may continue her lawsuit.

49ers hire Bill Walsh as manager

The Hall of Fame coach agreed to a four-year contract as the team's new general manager

By Dennis Georgatos
The Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Trying to recharge a front office left in disarray by the departures of its top people, the San Francisco 49ers reached into their past for stability and direction Wednesday by hiring Bill Walsh as general manager.

Walsh, the Hall of Fame coach who laid the groundwork for the 49ers' long-running success, signed a four-year contract. Terms weren't disclosed.

It is his third tour with the club. He coached the 49ers to three Su-