

SPORTS

NBA Locks Out Players

By CHRIS SHERIDAN

The NBA's summer of labor discord tips off tonight at midnight Eastern time.

That's when the lockout begins and all business will come to a halt: No trades, no free agent signings, no practices, no resolving the Michael Jordan question.

After going more than a week since the last talks on a new collective bargaining agreement, the league announced Monday what everyone knew was coming - a lockout that could wipe out games for the first time in NBA history.

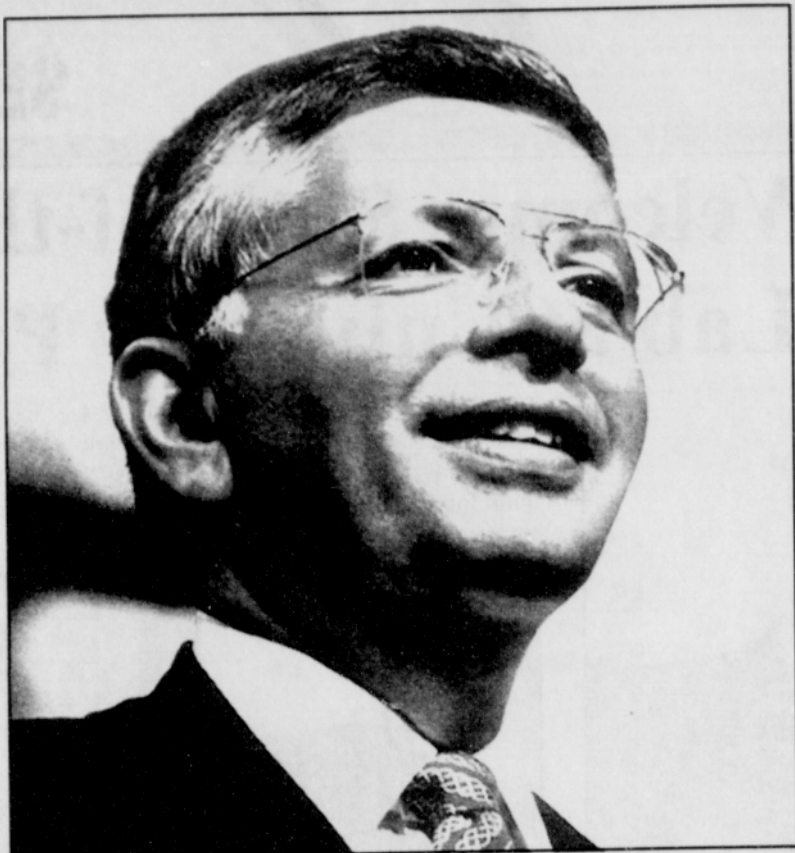
"We need a way to slow down salary growth to bring it in line with our revenue growth," commissioner David Stern said. "The current system does not work."

"We can't afford to play next season under the current system. That's just the reality. That's why owners elected to lockout," Stern said.

The move came as no surprise. Players were told throughout last season to expect a long work stoppage, and talks were going nowhere before breaking off.

The biggest question now is when it will end.

"We spent all of this year urging players to save their money so they would be able to survive a lockout," union director Billy Hunter said.



David Stern

"We've taken continuous polls among the players, and they are prepared to go the distance."

Stern even acknowledged that the impasse could last into November, when the season opens, or even into 1999.

"Yes, that is fair and accurate. There are a number of clubs that will do better not operating than operating. That's something the players don't seem to understand," Stern said.

This will be the third lockout in league history. A lockout in the sum-

mer of 1995 lasted three months; in 1996 it lasted only a few hours.

The old agreement was to run for six years, but the owners had the right to reopen it if the amount of designated revenue being paid toward player salaries exceeded a certain level - 51.8 percent of basketball-related income.

The owners say they are now devoting 57 percent of those revenues to player salaries, a total of almost \$1 billion.

The impending lockout already caused 12 NBA players to be removed from the team scheduled to compete next month at the world championships in Greece. USA Basketball, the governing body for the national team, will replace them with a team of Americans currently playing overseas, minor leaguers and possibly some collegians.

Despite meeting nine times since April, the owners and players have made only minimal progress on a new agreement to replace the one expiring at midnight tonight.

"We've made four different proposals, all involving player salaries going up every year," deputy commissioner Russ Granik said. "The players made one set of proposals, and have never moved off those proposals in any way on economic issues."

Stern and Granik said the league's profit margins have been shrinking for the last five years, and almost half of the 29 teams stood to lose money in the just-completed season.

"The final numbers aren't in, but for first time, as a whole, we believe the league was actually unprofitable last season," Stern said.

He also said the NBA would accept an agreement similar to the NFL's, in which a salary cap could not be exceeded for any reason.

The players have vowed to resist any form of a "hard" salary cap and want to keep the current "soft" cap, especially the rule known as the "Larry Bird exception," which allows teams to exceed the salary cap to retain their own free agents.

Such an exception allowed the Chicago Bulls to pay Michael Jordan more than \$33 million last season despite the salary cap being set at \$26.9 million.

"At the last bargaining meeting, the union said that unless the owners were prepared to agree to maintain the 'Larry Bird exception' as is, they had nothing further to talk about," Granik said, referring to the June 22 session, which broke off after only 30 minutes.

"We need an agreement that is not totally open-ended, and if there's a way to do so that

keeps the exception - or some elements of it - we're prepared to do that."

Hunter pointed out that only 10 percent of players signed their current contracts under the Bird exception.

"For the other 90 percent, it's a fixed cap. Without the exception, teams wouldn't have room to accommodate most of the players," he said.

The lockout means teams cannot conduct practices, summer camps, workouts, coaching sessions or team meetings. A handful of players who were to be paid part of their salaries this summer will not receive those paychecks until the lockout ends.

Unlike the last lockout, teams will not be barred from working with players rehabilitating from injuries as long as those sessions take place outside of NBA facilities.

Also, some previously scheduled charity games will be allowed to proceed.

Hunter said he expects to meet again with Stern in mid-July.

"If there's a softening in our position, we'll let them know," Hunter said. "But the league is profitable, the commissioner and the deputy commissioner are the highest paid in professional sports, the number of league employees is growing and the average salary of coaches is higher than that of the players. So why are things so bad?"

TYSON COULD FIGHT IN OCTOBER

By TIM DAHLBERG

Mike Tyson plans to fight in either October or November if Nevada boxing authorities agree to reinstate him after a one-year suspension.

Adviser Shelly Finkel said Tyson will apply next month for the license, which was taken away after Tyson bit Evander Holyfield twice on the ears during their WBA heavyweight title fight last June.

Finkel said Tyson would have his first comeback fight either in October or November if the commission looks favorably on his application.

"I've got to believe the chances of him getting a license are good," Finkel said. "He has behaved in the last year."

Tyson is eligible to apply for a new license July 9, a year after the Nevada State Athletic Commission revoked his license and fined him \$3 million for the infamous biting in the rematch of their first heavyweight title fight.

Tyson was disqualified in the third round by referee Mills Lane after he bit a chunk out of Holyfield's left ear, then bit his right ear after the fight was resumed.

Finkel, who said he will represent the former heavyweight champion in his dealings with Nevada boxing authorities, is one of several people who Tyson has aligned himself with after splitting from promoter Don King and his former co-managers, John Horne and Rory Holloway.

Tyson has filed suits in New York

and California in efforts to get out of contracts with King and Horne and Holloway.

Finkel hasn't talked to King recently about a possible settlement of the contractual dispute, but said Tyson's attorneys believe he can go ahead and fight without a settlement.

"We don't believe he's under that contract," Finkel said.

Tyson, who split from King in February, reportedly owes millions in taxes and has encountered cash flow problems in the months since he has not been in the ring.

Tyson made \$140 million in purses in six fights since his release from prison in 1995, but half of that money went to his co-managers and King, according to contracts contained in court records.

While under suspension, he earned \$3.5 million to play the role of enforcer for the World Wrestling Federation in its Wrestlemania matches in March.

If Tyson gets his license back, he is expected to take a fight against a mediocre opponent, much as he did when he fought Peter McNeely after his release from prison on a rape conviction in 1995.

The big fight awaiting Tyson, though, is a possible third match with Holyfield, which could rival the grossing power of the first two fights.

Holyfield has indicated interest in such a fight, but said it would have to work into a timetable he has of unifying the heavyweight titles, then retiring in 2000.

Hingis, Novotna Win at Wimbledon

By STEPHEN WILSON

Venus Williams powered into the Wimbledon quarterfinals today, easily beating the player who knocked her sister out the tournament a day earlier.

Volleying with authority for the first time and showing an all-court game that could make her a real title threat, Williams defeated Virginia Ruano-Pascual 6-3, 6-1.

The prospect of a fourth-round meeting between Venus and her sister was dashed Monday when 16-year-old Serena Williams failed to get past Ruano-Pascual. Citing a calf injury, Serena quit the third-round match while trailing 7-5,

4-1. Venus took pleasure in avenging that result.

"I wanted to win every point, all the points that Serena couldn't win yesterday," the 18-year-old American said. "I didn't like it when she (Ruano-Pascual) came back to 4-3. That was negligent on my part. I had to get serious to make sure she didn't get too many more games."

Also advancing to the quarterfinals were defending champion Martina Hingis, last year's runner-up Jana Novotna and French Open champion Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

Hingis, the top seed, beat Thailand's

Tamarine Tanasugarn 6-3, 6-2, No. 3 Novotna downed No. 10 Irina Spirlea 6-2, 6-3 and No. 5 Sanchez Vicario rallied for a 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 win over Dominique Van Roost.

Williams will face Novotna in the quarters, while Hingis will play Sanchez Vicario.

In men's play, defending champion Pete Sampras moved closer to his fifth title in six years by beating French qualifier Sebastian Grosjean 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 to reach the quarters.

Sampras, who hasn't dropped a set so far, finished the match with his 13th and 14th aces. He was never broken, faced

only one break point and broke Grosjean four times.

"I felt pretty good today," Sampras said. "I haven't played a baseliner until today, which was a little bit unusual. I'm playing pretty well, holding serve pretty handily. It's been a pretty good week."

Sampras, whose third-round match stretched over four days because of rain delays, was happy to get this one over quickly.

"It was nice to start a match and complete a match in one day," he said. Sampras will next face big-serving Mark Philippoussis, who downed fellow Australian Jason Stoltenberg 5-7, 6-1, 6-3, 6-3.

World Cup Soccer Roundup

By JOSEPH WHITE

Both favorites won. Both by 2-1. That doesn't come close to telling the story.

The story was in the face of Edgar Davids, running toward a sea of orange in the stands, his left index finger thrust in the air as he celebrated his first goal for his country. It was a second-half game-winner during injury time Monday that lifted the Netherlands into the World Cup quarterfinals.

"I put all of myself into the final shot, and I scored," said the 25-year-old midfielder, breaking a two-year media silence to discuss the 25-yard blast that eliminated Yugoslavia in the 92nd minute.

The story also was the sight of Germany's veterans, sprawled on the grass, gasping for air, their aging legs cramping in 91-degree heat. They didn't just win, they survived a heart-stopping scare, needing two goals 11 minutes apart deep in the second half to beat Mexico.

"I wouldn't want to go through such a game every day," German coach Berti Vogts said. "My team went

through 90 minutes of torture. We won with our fighting spirit. They found the strength to win a game that was nearly lost."

Croatia joined the quarterfinalists today with a 1-0 victory over Romania, on a penalty kick by Davor Suker in first-half injury time.

It was the first time since 1974 that a first-time World Cup team reached the quarters, and Croatia will play Germany on Saturday in Lyon.

Argentina and England played tonight to fill the last quarterfinal spot, and there was more fan violence on the eve of that game.

A sudden show of force by riot troops triggered insults, scuffles and wild baton charges early today in the center of Saint-Etienne, where the game will be played tonight. Police arrested several English fans and local toughs. There were some minor injuries, mostly caused during crowd stampedes.

"This is the worst moment in my career," Mijatovic said. "The Dutch goalie is tall, so I decided to shoot high and under the bar. It didn't work. I'm sad for my teammates."

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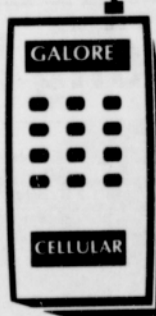
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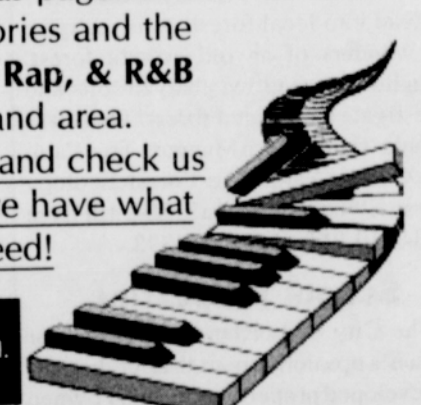
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