

Pro Hockey

NHL wants Seattle, but is the Emerald City a hockeytown?

By TIM BOOTH
Associated Press

KENT, Wash. — They showed up on a Tuesday night in early January to enjoy the 2-for-1 beers and hot dogs, the free parking, the \$15 tickets a few rows off the ice and the chance to chant “Portland sucks,” for three hours.

Some of the more than 5,000 people in attendance wore the jerseys of the Islanders, Sharks, Rangers, Maple Leafs, Bruins, Canucks, Golden Knights and of course, the hometown Seattle Thunderbirds of the junior-level Western Hockey League. Someday it may be the Sasquatch, Totems or Sockeyes or whatever a potential future NHL franchise in Seattle ends up adopting as its nickname.

This scene plays out regularly inside the ShoWare Center, about 20 miles south-east of downtown Seattle. Junior hockey in Seattle has a storied history. Hockey’s history in the Emerald City dates back more than a century to when the Seattle Metropolitans hoisted the 1917 Stanley Cup.

All indications are that the NHL and Seattle are on the verge of a marriage sometime in 2018. The arrival of an NHL franchise — likely in 2020 or 2021 depending on construction of a remodeled Seattle Center arena — will fill a void in the gloomy months of the sports calendar and drop the NHL into the biggest market in the country

without a winter sports team.

But can a booming Seattle eventually become a hockeytown?

“It’s the last place in the United States in my opinion to catch on to hockey,” said former Philadelphia Flyers general manager and current Thunderbirds GM Russ Farwell.

“Everyone assumes that because we’re close to Canada we’re into hockey and that’s not the case,” Farwell continued. “There is no reason this can’t be a good hockey town and I think there is a lot of pluses.”

The first test of Seattle’s willingness to embrace the NHL will arrive in the coming months when the prospective NHL ownership group begins a season-ticket drive, the same way the league tested Las Vegas.

But finding a foothold in Seattle will be an examination of how starved fans are for another team. Basketball is embedded in the DNA of the region thanks to 41 years of the SuperSonics until 2008 and a lengthy history of producing NBA talent. When the rain of the fall and winter drive young athletes inside, they grab a basketball and head for the nearest gym to play pickup games.

Basketball courts and coffee shops seem to be on every corner, but ice rinks are scarce.

“The chance to participate and stay involved and play the game needs ice rinks and that’s all it would take,” Farwell said. “There’s no



In this Jan. 9 photo, fans cheer at the ShoWare Center in Kent, Wash., about 20 miles south of Seattle, after the Seattle Thunderbirds scored a goal during a Western Hockey League game against the Portland Winterhawks.

reason this couldn’t be grown to be a good hockey city and center and stuff but it’s not automatic and it’s not just going to happen.”

Any NHL team in Seattle would find a completely different landscape than a decade ago when the Sonics and NBA moved to Oklahoma City and the city lost its winter sports outlet.

Seattle’s skyline is filled with as many construction cranes as snowcapped peaks in the surrounding mountains. Amazon has taken over an entire section of the city, joined nearby by satellite offices of Google and Facebook. The amount of wealth now in the Seattle market is part of the reason Oak View CEO Tim Leiweke has regularly called Seattle “a brilliant marketplace” and one of the most enticing expansion opportunities in pro sports history.

Seattle has become a city of transplants due to the booming local economy. A hockey franchise would provide those newcomers a team to rally around, much like what happened when the Sounders of the MLS arrived in 2009.

But it’s a different sports marketplace than a decade ago, when ticket sales and television revenues were driving franchise success. The globalization of sports due to technology has become a challenge for all leagues, said Jennifer Hoffman of the College of Education at the University of Washington.

“I think the question about our population is what sports are they interested in? And that’s going to be a challenge for all of our franchises, our big franchises and our smaller ones,” Hoffman said. “It’s not a Seattle phenomenon

but we’re a good case for this point in history where digital transition is really occurring and it’s really hard to know who your fans are and where they are.”

John Barr believes there are plenty of potential hockey fans in the Seattle market. A Bay Area transplant, Barr has become the voice of hockey fans with his NHLtoSeattle.com website and social accounts. Barr got hooked on the sport while attending San Jose games when the Sharks arrived the Bay Area. He’s regularly makes trips to Boston, Minnesota, Montreal, Nashville and Las Vegas for games.

“The Seahawks run this town and I think a lion share of people obviously want the Sonics back,” Barr said. “I totally understand the hierarchy there, but I just think this is a great opportunity for the area to have the NHL and

have a winter sport.”

Season tickets are just one of several significant obstacles. Arena construction won’t begin until later this year with an ambitious goal of completion in late 2020. There are also transportation issues near the arena site.

And the franchise needs to be awarded in the first place. NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman wouldn’t even entertain discussion about Seattle recently.

“The application has not yet been filed so any speculation about Seattle is, at this point, a little premature,” Bettman said.

In the corner of his office, Thunderbirds Vice President Colin Campbell has a photo of Wayne Gretzky in the foreground with Campbell behind the glass. He grew up in Edmonton and was a Zamboni driver for the Oilers in his younger years. Now he ponders the future of hockey in Seattle with the NHL on the horizon.

“It always amazed me when I first got here that people didn’t even know there was a hockey team in town. Well, that’s still the case,” said Campbell, who moved to Seattle in 1995. “It’s still out there, and yet we’re doing very well in this building and everything is going good. But it’s a big market, it’s a tough market to reach ... so with an NHL team coming in and working together it will create new opportunities to grow.”

USA Gymnastics

Ex-sports doctor’s victims draw strength from each other

By TAMMY WEBBER AND
DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. — Clasina Syrovoy would change the subject whenever someone asked if she knew former sports doctor Larry Nassar or mentioned news coverage of the unfolding scandal over his sexual abuse of young gymnasts.

She didn’t want to be “another Jane Doe on the list,” said Syrovoy, who competed for 15 years. She certainly didn’t want to reveal herself publicly as a victim.

“But as everything unfolded before my eyes like a really bad ‘Lifetime’ original movie based on true events, I gained some courage,” Syrovoy said in court Monday, confronting Nassar at his sentencing hearing. “After watching a few of my former teammates step up and say that this had happened to them also, I gained a little more.”

In an extraordinary scene unfolding in a Michigan courtroom, almost 160 women and girls are coming forward — far more than originally expected — to confront the man who molested them when they were vulnerable girls told to trust the doctor who could help them achieve their dreams.



Clasina Syrovoy takes a moment to regain her composure Monday during the fifth day of victim impact statements against Larry Nassar in Ingham County Circuit Court in Lansing, Mich.

Nassar, 54, has admitted sexually assaulting athletes under the guise of medical treatment when he was employed by Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics, which as the sport’s national governing organization trains Olympians. He already has been sentenced to 60 years in prison for child pornography.

Under a plea bargain, he faces a minimum of 25 to 40 years behind bars in the molestation case. The ultimate sentence imposed could be much higher.

The sentencing has taken on a #MeToo momentum, though the case predates the uproar over Hollywood

producer Harvey Weinstein. It began with a 2016 Indianapolis Star investigation of how USA Gymnastics handled sexual abuse allegations against coaches. That prompted former gymnast Rachael Denhollander to alert the newspaper to Nassar’s abuse.

“I knew this was the time,” Denhollander said. “One anonymous, quiet voice was not going to be enough. I was 100 percent confident there were other victims speaking up and being silenced.”

From there, the number of victims coming forward continued to grow, getting another jolt with the sentencing that began last

week. Originally, fewer than 90 women and girls were expected to give statements.

Although they can choose to remain anonymous, many of the accusers — some of them minors — have opted to make their names public. Some have had others read statements on their behalf.

On Friday, Olympians Aly Raisman and Jordyn Wieber made a surprise appearance in court, allowing their names to be used.

“My dream is that one day, everyone will know what the words ‘Me too’ signify, but they will be educated and able to protect themselves from predators like Larry,” Raisman, 23, said.

On Monday, physical therapist and former gymnast Marta Stern said she originally wanted to remain anonymous “out of fear of how it would affect my life, my loved ones and my career.”

“However, I will no longer let you have control over me. I will not let you win,” she told Nassar.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Rosemarie Aquilina addresses each victim after she speaks, serving almost as a therapist. She calls the group of victims an “army,” and the courtroom often breaks into applause.

“You’re sister survivors and you are going through incomprehensible lengths, emotions and soul-searching

to put your words together ... to make people listen,” the judge told Syrovoy. “He’s the one that needs to be ashamed. Release the shame, embarrassment, guilt that you said you have here and now.”

The case has triggered calls for the resignation of Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon, while the state’s attorney general has agreed to review how the university handled complaints against Nassar. And three key members of the board that oversees USA Gymnastics resigned Monday, 10 months after former President Steve Penny quit after critics said the organization failed to protect gymnasts from abusive coaches and Nassar. USA Gymnastics also announced the suspension of former women’s national team coach John Geddert, the owner of a gymnastics club where Nassar sexually abused girls near Lansing, Michigan.

Longtime Detroit defense attorney David Steingold, who isn’t involved in the case, supports the judge’s decision to let so many victims testify, even if the crimes for which he is being sentenced involve only seven.

“It’s the least we can do for these women,” said Steingold, noting that women often are afraid of being

made to feel responsible for allowing abuse to happen.

Harvard psychiatry professor Dr. Judith Lewis Herman said she has never seen so many victims of one perpetrator come forward, and the #MeToo movement almost certainly played a role.

“When powerful celebrities come forward years later and admit how intimidated and shamed they were for so many years, I think that has been enormously empowering to other survivors,” she said, adding that the experience of knowing they’re being heard is “enormously healing.”

Even so, victims will pay a price for coming forward, said victim Marion Siebert.

“Every time someone Googles them, for the rest of their lives, they will see the sickening things we’re talking about here today,” she said. “When they apply for a job, when they go on a first date, they won’t be able to be the ones to fully make the choice on when to talk about what happened. This terrible part of their past is exposed to all.”

Syrovoy said that speaking up will allow her to move forward.

“After today, I will not cry anymore,” she told Nassar. “I am done. ... You are a disaster.”

Pro Tennis

Injured Nadal out of Australian Open; Cilic advances to semis

By JOHN PYE
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — One point after his medical timeout in the fourth set, Rafael Nadal went to the rear

of the court to squat and do a knee-raise, trying to stretch out his injured right leg.

Three games later — one point after his subsequent visit from the trainer — Nadal had to delay Marin Cilic’s serve while trying to walk out the pain at the start of the fifth set.

After limping and wincing through two more games, and after failing to fend off a sixth break point, the 16-time major champion was out of the Australian Open.

The sixth-seeded Cilic advanced to his first semifinal in Australia since 2010 with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-7 (5), 6-2,

2-0 victory Tuesday. He will next play 49th-ranked Kyle Edmund, who beat third-ranked Grigor Dimitrov 6-4, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 to reach a Grand Slam semifinal for the first time.

“Tough moments — not (for) the first time here,” Nadal said. “I’m a positive person, but today is an opportunity lost to be in a semifinal for a Grand Slam and fight for an important title for me.

“It’s really tough to accept.”

Injuries to star players dominated headlines before the tournament. Five-time Australian Open finalist Andy Murray withdrew so he could have surgery on his hip. Nadal (right knee), six-time champion Novak Djokovic (right elbow) and 2014 champion Stan

Wawrinka (left knee) left their fitness decisions to the eve of the tournament — it’s no surprise they are all out of the tournament.

There are limits to human endurance, and Nadal found his on Tuesday.

“Somebody who is running the tour should think (a) little bit about what’s going on. Too many people getting injured,” said Nadal, who was still limping and grimacing at a post-match news conference. “I don’t know if they have to think a little bit about the health of the players.

“I don’t know if we keep playing in this very, very hard surfaces what’s going to happen in the future with our lives.”

Nadal said the timing and the number of tournaments on the schedule and the proliferation of hardcourts are concerns. Other players have expressed similar views.

Last year’s Australian Open was one for the ages, with Roger Federer returning from a six-month injury layoff and beating Nadal in five sets in the final, and Serena Williams beating her sister, Venus, for the women’s title. Serena opted not to defend her title, deciding she hadn’t had enough time to recover from giving birth to her first child in September. Venus Williams lost in the first round.

This year’s Australian Open is shaping up more as one of discovery. On the women’s side, Angelique Kerber was the only major champion to reach the quarterfinals.

No. 35-ranked Elise Mertens upset fourth-seeded Elina Svitolina 6-4, 6-0 to extend her winning streak to 10 matches, becoming the first Belgian since Kim Clijsters in 2012 to reach the semifinals.

Up next for her is second-

ranked Caroline Wozniacki, who finished off a 6-0, 6-7 (3), 6-2 win over Carla Suarez Navarro after 1:30 a.m.

Wozniacki, who is still chasing her first Grand Slam title, can also return to No. 1 for the first time in six years depending on results in Melbourne.

The second-ranked Federer is still in contention for his 20th major, with a quarterfinal against Tomas Berdych on Wednesday. On Federer’s side of the draw, 58th-ranked Hyeon Chung and 97th-ranked Tenny Sandgren are playing for a spot in the semifinals.

Cilic against Edmund was an unlikely pairing on the top half of the men’s draw. Edmund had never played in a major quarterfinal, had never won five consecutive matches at tour level, had lost both of his previous matches against Dimitrov and had never beaten a top-five

player.

He checked all those boxes on Rod Laver Arena.

“I am loving it right now, just the way I’m playing,” Edmund said. “My first Grand Slam semifinal. First time I played on one of the biggest courts in the world. To beat a quality of player like Grigor. They’re great feelings. So, yeah, I just try to enjoy it as much as possible.”

Nadal left dejected. It was the second time he had had to retire during an Australian Open quarterfinal — the previous time was against Murray in 2010.

He said he felt muscle pain in his upper right leg in the third set against Cilic but played through it. In the fourth set, chasing a drop shot, he felt the pain get worse “but didn’t realize how bad.”

He had an injury timeout at 4-1 down in the fourth set, and another at the end of the set.



Nadal