

WOMEN'S HOCKEY

NWHL holds door open in bid to thaw relationship with PWHPA

BY JOHN WAWROW
AP Hockey Writer

Tyler Tumminia is leaving the door open should members of the Professional Women's Hockey Players' Association ever want to reach out to the National Women's Hockey League in a bid to thaw what has been a chilly relationship.

The NWHL's first-year commissioner said she is willing to listen, and doesn't believe the two sides' objectives in growing the sport are all that different.

"I don't think the door's ever been closed here," Tumminia told The Associated Press this week in announcing the NWHL's decision to double its salary cap to \$300,000 for each of its six teams entering its seventh season.

"I'm always going to think about the future, and salary cap increases and ownership coming in and infusing cash dollars that were needed in order to show growth and progress," she added. "It's all along the same lines the PWHPA is looking for as well."

The PWHPA was formed two years ago in large part because a majority of North America's top players balked at joining the U.S.-based NWHL following the demise of the Canadian Women's Hockey League.

Skeptical of the NWHL's economic model, especially after the league slashed salaries nearly in half a month into its second season in 2016, the PWHPA members instead sought a fresh start. Their objective was to form a new league — preferably with the NHL's backing — and featuring a sustainable economic model in which players would be fairly compensated in wages and benefits.

Whether the NWHL's boost in pay is enough to begin a conversation is uncertain.



Matt Slocum/AP file

Goalie Shannon Szabados (1), of Canada, plays the flying puck during the 2018 Winter Olympics gold medal game against the United States in Gangneung, South Korea. Szabados, a PWHPA member, remains skeptical of the NWHL's recently revamped financial model.

PWHPA executive Jayna Hefford favorably greeted the development.

"It's great to see that the league is making positive steps towards supporting their athletes better financially," Hefford wrote in a text to AP. "That is the direction this game and its players — now and future — deserve."

PWHPA member and former Canadian national team goalie Shannon Szabados was skeptical.

"Until I see a league in North America that I would want my daughter to play in, my stance with the PWHPA remains united to create a better opportunity for future generations," Szabados wrote in a text.

The NWHL is now operating under a revamped executive structure under Tumminia and a newly established board of governors, with league founder Dani Rylan Kearney out of the picture.

Rylan Kearney stepped down as commissioner last fall and has since resigned her role overseeing the NWHL's four teams controlled by W Hockey

Partners: The New Jersey-based Metropolitan Riveters, Connecticut Whale, Minnesota Whitecaps and Buffalo Beauts.

The PWHPA has spent the past two years holding a series of barn-storming weekend tours across the North America, many of them backed by NHL franchises.

The PWHPA features five hub cities (two in the United States and three in Canada) where players have access to practice rinks and facilities and is backed by sponsors including Secret, Budweiser and Adidas.

The NWHL cites major marketing agreements it reached over the past two years, including one with Discover, that provided enough cost certainty to increase the salary cap even though the league has yet to reach profitability.

The test for both should come this year, with national team members preparing for the 2022 Beijing Games. The PWHPA's non-national team members could consider the NWHL.

Derby

Continued from B1

A victory by Essential Quality would bring extra scrutiny of human rights issues involving the sheikh, who won't be among the limited fans in attendance.

The Kentucky Horse Racing Commission received a complaint this week from a group of human rights attorneys and students at the University of Louisville seeking to have Sheikh Mohammed banned from the Derby over alleged human rights abuses. A judge in England ruled that he orchestrated the abductions of two of his adult daughters.

Essential Quality's jockey, Luis Saez, is seeking his first Derby win after crossing the finish line first aboard Maximum Security in 2019 only to have his colt disqualified.

"Essential Quality is a deserving favorite," trainer Todd Pletcher said, "but I think it's a wide-open race."

Pletcher, a two-time Derby winner, saddles four starters, led by 6-1 shot Known Agenda. His others are listed at double-digit odds: 20-1 Dynamic One, 30-1 Bourbonic and 50-1 Sainthood.

The biggest question for these 3-year-olds is whether they can handle the 1¼ miles while getting jostled in a field of 19. King Fury spiked a fever on Friday and trainer Ken McPeck said he would be scratched. As a result, the four horses to the outside of the colt's No. 16 post will move in one spot in the starting gate. They'll be running in front of a noisy crowd for the first time since the pandemic forced tracks to close to the public last year.



Charlie Riedel/AP

Kentucky Derby entrant Essential Quality works out at Churchill Downs on Thursday in Louisville, Kentucky. The 147th running of the Kentucky Derby is scheduled for Saturday.

Besides Essential Quality, the other undefeated horses in the field are 5-1 Rock Your World and 50-1 Helium, both 3-0. Rock Your World won his first two starts on turf before switching to dirt and winning the Santa Anita Derby.

Two-time Derby-winning trainer Doug O'Neill goes for another with 8-1 shot Hot Rod Charlie, a colt co-owned by his nephew Patrick O'Neill and four of his former Brown University football teammates. "It's going to be the race of a lifetime for these guys," Doug O'Neill said.

For all its tradition, this year's Derby is one of firsts:

- It's the first to be run without Lasix. Previously allowed on race day, the anti-bleeding medication has been banned by Churchill Downs and the other Triple Crown tracks.

- Brad Cox attempts to become the first Louisville-born trainer to win. Besides saddling Essential Quality, he has 15-1 shot Mandaloun, whose Juddmonte Farms owner Saudi Prince Khalid bin Ab-

dullah died in January. Cox says a victory would make him "a pretty good 'Jeopardy!' question that nobody will answer."

- Kendrick Carmouche, aboard Bourbonic, could be the first Black jockey to win in 119 years. The Derby was won by Black riders in 15 of its first 28 editions.

- Vicki Oliver saddles 50-1 shot Hidden Stash in a bid to become the first female trainer to win. Shelley Riley finished second with Casual Lies in 1992.

- Baffert, tied with Ben Jones for the most Derby wins at six, goes for a record seventh with Medina Spirit, a 15-1 shot, after his other hopefuls were derailed along the Derby trail. "I'm coming in there quiet, but I need luck," he said.

- Mike Smith, aboard 20-1 shot Midnight Bourbon, would be the oldest jockey to win at age 55.

Saturday's forecast calls for sunshine, low humidity and a high of 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Post time is 3:57 p.m. PDT.

COVID-19

Continued from B1

Because Washington County is at high risk, the Hops can host about 825 fans (15% capacity) at Ron Tonkin Field. The Vancouver Canadians, a High-A affiliate of

the Toronto Blue Jays, also will be playing their home games in Hillsboro this season, starting May 11, and their games will be subject to the same capacity limits as the Hops' games.

High school sports: Baseball, softball, track and field,

golf and tennis competitions can continue in extreme-risk counties, but with a maximum of 100 participants and 100 spectators.

Youth sports: Outdoor youth sports can continue in extreme-risk counties, but with a cap of 100 spectators.

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