

Right fight on fright night?

Viggy and Hordi sort of clear the air about so-called orders

By Ben Kuzma, The Province January 15, 2010

Darcy Hordichuk wanted to fight, Alex Bolduc shouldn't have fought and Alain Vigneault had to fight the suggestion that he instructed his players to scrap Wednesday during the third period of a lopsided loss in Minnesota.

With the Vancouver Canucks absorbing a 5-2 whipping by the Wild, Hordichuk squared off with Derek Boogaard at 11:11 and just 17 seconds later Bolduc targeted Cal Clutterbuck but wound up as a punching bag for the towering John Scott. Bolduc re-injured his shoulder in the one-sided pounding as the Canucks attempted to salvage something from fright night.

But the biggest blow came postgame when Boogaard suggested that Hordichuk had told him that Vigneault had sent his enforcer out to fight.

Vigneault was adamant that he didn't send anybody out to scrap. Not Hordichuk. Not Bolduc. Not Tanner Glass. In a powder-keg week for the Canucks, it was another bomb that needed defusing.

"No, I never did say that and at the end of the day I probably believe Boogaard on this one," Vigneault said Thursday. "It wouldn't surprise me that Hordi told him: 'Coach told me I've got to fight.' It must have been a real intellectual conversation. How smart can you be to go after a guy like that?"

"I had a conversation with him [Hordichuk]. He told me he didn't remember what he said. I had a conversation with [NHL vice-president] Colin Campbell -- because I'm on speed-dial lately -- and just told Colin that I never said that, but I wouldn't be surprised if he [Hordichuk] said that.

"When I played, you couldn't turn down a fight. The game is different and it's tougher for players to find dancing partners and I'm sure they come up with creative stuff. And this is just one of those creative things."

If that's how this really played out, then it's strange that Hordichuk would need a verbal nudge from the coach to do his job. If he doesn't do it instinctively, Hordichuk will be unemployed. After all, he cited questionable hits on Alex Edler and Willie Mitchell as the catalysts to go after Boogaard.

"AV is the last guy who would ever send a player out," said Hordichuk, who was also assessed a 10-minute misconduct for wanting a piece of Clutterbuck after the Boogaard bout. "I don't know what I said to him at the time we were lining up. He wasn't looking at me and I wasn't sure he was going to fight. I told the refs ahead of time I might get a two-minute instigator.

"When the coach has to tell me to fight, I'm not going to be in the league very long. When guys are picking on your guys, that's your green light to go after them."

And as for Bolduc, his motivation was courageous and costly. Being on the roster bubble with Ryan Johnson close to returning from foot fractures likely meant the lightweight thought he needed to impress by duelling with a heavyweight. But when he took punch after punch from the 6-foot-8, 258-pound Scott, even his teammates cringed.

"He was talking to me about sticking around and getting in a fight, but I was a little concerned," said defenceman Shane O'Brien. "Scott didn't let up on him."

© Copyright (c) The Province

Campbell on L'affair Burrows-Auger

League disciplinarian has his say about player's, ref's sides of story

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 15, 2010

What was striking when the Alex Burrows-Stephane Auger saga was strained through the league-approved cheesecloth Thursday was the remarkable similarities which showed up between the player and the referee.

Both shared with NHL disciplinarian Colin Campbell nearly identical versions of what happened before Monday's game with one key exception. It was an important one over whether Auger told Burrows he was going to get him.

Whether Auger made the threat or not, both he and Burrows have had their reputations tarnished. Maybe irrecoverably.

Burrows remains a little stunned. He said Thursday he doesn't know yet if he regrets anything because he hasn't had an opportunity to fully digest it all. It's understandable. A hockey player's schedule is unrelenting.

When he does look around, he'll see his character has been assailed. Some went out of their way to call him names, label him a whiner and disparaged his game to the point where he was compared to Steve Downie. All this -- plus a \$2,500 US fine and a perception officials will mark him with a Scarlet Letter -- for telling what he believes is the truth.

Asked whether he thought the league gave him a fair shake and really heard him out, he said: "Not really."

Auger may have it worse. His credibility has taken a whipping and he's been helpless to defend himself. An argument can be made some of it is deserved. Not all of it. One local report went so far as to suggest Auger was the central figure in the Shane Doan slur fiasco. He was not.

To be clear, it was linesman Michel Cormier who misheard Doan and unfairly accused him in 2005. Auger did assess the penalty. But that was his job -- to report it to the timekeeper.

This is important because Auger deserves his say. He got it Thursday through Campbell, who was finally forthcoming in explaining his decision to fine Burrows and let Auger off the hook.

Campbell acknowledged Auger had been called to the carpet because he was duped by Burrows into assessing Jerred Smithson with a game misconduct Dec. 8. It's the reason he approached Burrows before the game, something Campbell said is unusual.

"He said [to Burrows]: 'Look, you don't have to embarrass me, I was making the call anyway. You got the five-minute call and you weren't injured. You embarrassed me,'" Campbell explained.

"Then [Auger told Campbell]: 'At no time did I say I was going to extract any vengeance.'"

That is the crucial point. Part of the reason Campbell believed Auger is because he didn't see a reaction from Burrows when he studied the pregame chat tape.

"Regarding the 'I'm going to get you' -- we didn't see any reaction from Burrows on the tape. We thought there might be," Campbell said.

Canucks coach Alain Vigneault, in his strongest defence yet of his player, said there wasn't a reaction because Burrows was stunned.

"I believe Alex Burrows," Vigneault said. "There's no concrete proof that what he said is true. It's just circumstantial evidence.

"But when a referee goes to a player before a game and talks about an incident that happened a month before and says exactly the same thing Alex said [he said] except for 'I'm going to get you back' and the league says he didn't have a reaction when that was said to him? Well, Alex was stunned.

"He did have a big reaction when the two penalties were called. And he did have a huge reaction after the game."

Everyone agrees it was a poorly officiated game. Both Nashville and Vancouver shared concerns to the league. Campbell acknowledged he had some reservations about several calls while he was watching them live.

Burrows questioned both a diving penalty and his interference penalty, which led directly to the winning goal in a 3-2 Vancouver loss.

"Whenever you see an individual dive you wonder what will be called," Campbell said. "But [Auger] had the balls to call it. The guy dived.

"That interference call was a tough call. But you could support it."

Campbell explained to The Province Auger was told it was inappropriate for him to engage Burrows before the game, which set up the postgame fireworks.

"The timing wasn't right," Campbell said. "If he has to make a call like he did on him, you're setting yourself up for a problem. Call him up after the game. Ask the coach if you can talk to him. But don't do it before the game."

For what it's worth, Burrows held firmly to his position in Tuesday's conference call with Campbell. He never backed off his claim that Auger had a personal vendetta. It's a claim which Campbell said is not uncommon.

"We've had situations like this before," Campbell said. "Mostly coaches who believe there are certain officials who don't treat them with respect and have an attitude."

The difference in this case is Burrows made it public.

"When you call into question the integrity of the league in a public way, it doesn't help our league," Campbell said. "On the other side of the border [in the U.S.], we got the most coverage from one event we've had in a long time.

"It wasn't good coverage."

jbotchford@theprovince.com

© Copyright (c) The Province

If you beat the Penguins, here's how

Crosby and Malkin aren't the only dangerous players in Pittsburgh's lineup

By Jim Jamieson, The Province January 15, 2010

1. Contain Sidney Crosby.

The Canucks managed to hold Sid The Kid off the scoreboard when the Penguins last visited. That included Canucks goaltender Roberto Luongo stoning him on a penalty shot in overtime.

It might not be so easy this time around, as Crosby has been on a tear. Heading in to Thursday night's game in Edmonton, Crosby had six goals and two assists in his last four games. He hit the 30-goal mark Wednesday in Calgary in just his 47th game. His previous fastest pace to 30 goals was in his rookie year, when he got there in 63 games. The Canucks, with the last change, are well aware of this and Crosby can expect to see an awful lot of Ryan Kesler on Saturday night.

2. Don't wake up Evgeni Malkin.

The superbly talented Russian centre led the NHL in scoring in the regular season and the playoffs last season, as well as winning the Conn Smythe Trophy (playoff MVP) and the Stanley Cup.

This season has been nothing like that. A shoulder injury in late October that cost him nine games didn't help, but Malkin still is on a pace for 73 points (as opposed to 113 last season) and hadn't scored a goal in 10 games heading into Thursday night's game in Edmonton. Take him lightly? Bad idea.

3. Get in the Pittsburgh defencemen's faces.

The Penguins defence has taken heat this season for breaking down under forechecking pressure and the Canucks need to take a page out of that playbook.

Vancouver need to play the chip-and-chase game and finish their checks when the likes of skilled defencemen Sergei Gonchar, Alex Goligoski and Kris Letang are on the ice. The Pens forwards will be less of a threat if they can't break out of their own end easily. Calgary did it with some success on Wednesday, but the Canucks will have to do it better.

4. Make sure your goaltender is better than the other team's.

In Wednesday's game in Minnesota, Canucks goaltender Roberto Luongo had a poor game, letting in goals on the Wild's first two shots.

In the third, with the score tied 2-2, Minnesota scored on their first three shots of the period. Obviously, that can't happen on Saturday and you know Luongo will bounce back.

He'll need to, if, as expected, he's facing his Canadian Olympic team goalie teammate Marc-Andre Fleury, who was excellent in the Pens' 3-1 win in Calgary on Wednesday. Luongo will need to be better, because of the firepower he'll be facing from Pittsburgh.

5. Don't take the Penguins' power play lightly.

The last thing Vancouver needs to look at is the statistic that says the Pittsburgh power play is last overall in the NHL on the road.

It's hard to imagine, with offensive talent such as Crosby, Malkin and Gonchar on the ice with the man-advantage. But the Pens have scored power-play goals in two of their last three games

(heading into Thursday's game with the Oilers) and that coincides with Gonchar's return from a four-game injury absence.

In fact, Gonchar's missed 16 games already this year, the other 12 with a broken bone in his wrist. He's the key to the Pens' power play, and his being back means the Canucks' penalty killing will have to be very good.

jjamieson@theprovince.com

© Copyright (c) The Province

Two years ago, teams staged a GM Place classic

By Jim Jamieson, The Province January 15, 2010

Just over two years ago, when the Pittsburgh Penguins last came to town, the event was more like a rock festival than a hockey game.

Thousands of fans lined up like groupies in the visitors' end of the rink for the pregame warmup to catch an up-close look at young stars Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

The game didn't disappoint, either, with Vancouver goaltender Roberto Luongo putting on a show for the ages, denying Crosby on a penalty shot in overtime and again in the shootout. The only part of the script that didn't work out was Pens defenceman Kris Letang beating Luongo in the shootout for a 2-1 win.

Luongo will get his 19th straight start on Saturday, when the Penguins make their first visit to GM Place since that iconic game, and he doesn't deny it will be a little bit special.

"It was exciting," said Luongo of the Dec. 8, 2007 game. "I remember Sidney there with the penalty shot. It was a great game and the fans were into it. I think that's what makes it even better -- the electricity in the building. You could feel the crowd hanging on every moment. You can definitely feel the buzz around town, just like with Washington [and Alex Ovechkin]."

Luongo has played 28 of the Canucks' last 29 games, but maintains fatigue is not an issue after an off-form night in Wednesday's 5-2 loss in Minnesota.

"After last night, I was happy to get the opportunity to work on a few things," he said. "It had been a while since I had a good goalie practice like that."

Head coach Alain Vigneault said he's watching the fatigue factor.

"We're on a game-to-game basis and obviously last night [Wednesday] is a game all goaltenders during the season have," said Vigneault. "We went into Calgary and after the first period, they took [Miikka] Kiprusoff off. All players during an 82-game schedule are going to have an off night. When it's a goaltender, it's just more evident. The twins [Sedins] weren't very good last game and they had two scoring chances. They usually have seven or eight five-on-five, and usually create a ton on the power play. People are pointing to Louie's off game -- it's going to happen."

- Winger Pavol Demitra continues to progress toward returning to the lineup. He participated in the Canucks's optional practice Thursday, but still isn't medically cleared to play, making it highly doubtful he would play on Saturday.

© Copyright (c) The Province

Guerin just glad to be a Pen

By Tony Gallagher, The Province January 15, 2010

When the U.S. Olympic men's hockey team was announced on New Year's Day at the Winter Classic, Bill Guerin of the incoming Pittsburgh Penguins admits he was secretly hoping to hear his name.

And with his track record in international hockey, why wouldn't he be harbouring that hope? Other teams like Canada and Sweden had gone for at least one experienced elder statesman type on their roster and there was no particular reason to believe that GM Brian Burke might not go in the same direction.

But the 39-year-old who played such a major role in the Pens' hoisting of the Stanley Cup last year with that Game 7 win in Detroit last season is getting his wish this season, anyway.

He had hoped to play well enough to force the U.S. team brass at least to consider his name when they went to select that team, and he's satisfied they did.

And he has no problem with the American team that will be competing here next month.

"My goal this year was to play well enough so that they would have to think about me, and I know they did," says Guerin of his 15 goals so far this season playing with a group of guys who keep him young in so many ways.

"In the end, though, I think Brian did a good job in his selections. He's got a lot of different types of players on the team, guys who are good on the power play, good on the PK, character

Sports comment

guys, Big D men, mobile Ds.

"I thought Jamie Langenbrunner was a real good choice for captain and they have that older guy in a way in Chris Drury with a lot of experience. I really like this team and there's no reason to think they won't do well."

He should know. He was on the silver medal team that got to the final against that star-studded Canadian gold medal team in Salt Lake and he's familiar with the pressure Canada is going to be faced with trying to win on its home soil.

He was also on that '96 World Cup team when the U.S. beat Canada while Burke was working for the NHL and burst into the video replay booth to lobby for a U.S. ruling on a key disputed goal in the final against Canada. And he's won two Stanley Cups in two different ways.

The first was in New Jersey during the lockout year when Jacques Lemaire's team checked everyone into oblivion to win, and the second was last year with the young, swashbuckling Pens, both wins coming at the expense of the Red Wings.

And this year he's looking for another one.

"I never really thought about retiring seriously," said Guerin, many players preferring to call it quits after a Cup win, even though they can still play and are still having fun. "It's too much fun playing with these guys still, and with the talent we have, it keeps me young.

"Some days are clearly better than others the way I'm feeling, of course, but playing with Sid and Evgeny and the stars we have, practice is where it's often the most fun because you see them try all these little things and you see the skill they have. It's unbelievable and they both handle themselves so well. When you think about it, we're all lucky to be in this game."

Guerin has clearly gained the perspective of somebody nearing retirement, drinking in fully the final days of a run that began in '91 and saw him pass the 1,000-game mark back in February 2007. But he's still more than capable of looking ahead to another run at the big prize with this team.

"It's all a matter of health and timing," he says about real team success in the NHL. "We're comfortable with where we are in the standings, although not really where we'd like to be. We're concentrating on trying to play better and last night (a 3-1 win in Calgary) was a really good road win for us the way we were able to get it done.

"If we keep getting better and we get completely healthy, I think there's a good chance you'll see us around at the end."

© Copyright (c) The Province

Talk is cheap, but wins are expensive

Speculation swirls around who said what, even as losses pile up for Canucks

By Iain Macintyre, Vancouver Sun; Vancouver Sun January 15, 2010

News does not always travel quickly. At 2 p.m. Thursday, after about 64 hours at light speed, news slowed to an amble, as Vancouver Canucks Alex Burrows and Darcy Hordichuk exited GM Place together.

Quite the few days for the National Hockey League team. Burrows sparked a raging debate on code and ethics by charging Monday that referee Stephane Auger's pre-meditated revenge against him cost the Canucks their game against the Nashville Predators.

NHL senior vice-president Colin Campbell had just closed his investigation -- one day for the investigation, another to write the press release; we're not sure about the order - when he heard Hordichuk told Minnesota Wild heavyweight Derek Boogaard that Vancouver coach Alain Vigneault had ordered his players to fight Wednesday night.

Thank goodness long-distance phone rates have come down in recent years.

While Campbell was explaining his Burrows' decision in Toronto, where most insiders who rely on a friendly relationship with the NHL live, the Canucks were home Thursday practising because, in case you haven't heard, they are suddenly on a three-game losing streak.

By the way, Sidney Crosby and the Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins visit on Saturday.

After that, who knows? "We've got a great opportunity to move forward because we've got the Stanley Cup champions coming into our building," Vigneault said Thursday afternoon. "And I think players, and you and everybody else are going to be focused on that and not what Hordy said and what Boogaard said and what I said and what Burrows said."

Ah, yes, that stuff.

Vigneault addressed all of it Thursday. It was a partial practice day, led by assistant coaches. Often, Vigneault has someone else address the media on those days.

But the head coach delivered easily the best performance by a Canuck this week -a credit to Vigneault's leadership and backbone, as well as an indictment of his team's results.

Vigneault said he understood Campbell's decision to exonerate Auger and fine Burrows \$2,500 for dissent, yet was resolute in his support of his player and the belief the winger told the truth.

He also thoroughly extinguished the brush fire regarding Hordichuk, saying his enforcer may have told Boogaard he had to fight, but the coach never did.

"It must have been a real intellectual conversation," Vigneault mused about the third-period exchange of ideas between Hordichuk and Boogaard.

Earlier in the day, Campbell told a Toronto radio station there was no witness to corroborate Burrows' claim that Auger threatened payback before Monday's game because the Canuck goaded the referee into a major penalty and game misconduct call last month in Nashville.

"When we have two individuals involved in a situation, unless we can verify it by a third party, by a third neutral party, it's very difficult to take one side of it," Campbell said. "We didn't think our official said what Alex Burrows said he did."

Campbell also noted that Burrows did not react when Auger made the alleged threat.

"It's hearsay," Vigneault agreed. "And you can't [convict] someone on circumstantial evidence. At the end of the day, I think the circumstantial evidence proves Alex was right.

"I respect the league's decision and I understand their decision to fine him. I know in talking to Mr. Campbell, there's no concrete proof that what he said is true. But when a referee goes to a player before the game and talks about an incident that happened more than a month before and [admits saying] exactly the same thing that Alex said except for 'I'm going to get you back' ..."

"The league says he didn't have a reaction when that was said to him? Alex was stunned. He did, though, have a big reaction when the two penalties were called and he did have a huge reaction after the game. He was very emotional, and

Next game

Saturday

vs Pittsburgh Penguins

7 p.m.

at GM Place

CBC-HD/Team 1040

you don't make that stuff up.

"Now, I understand why the league is defending their employee, but we're going to defend our employee. We believe Alex."

And Campbell apparently believed Vigneault's version of events regarding Hordichuk's fight with Boogaard.

"I had a conversation with [Darcy]; he told me he didn't remember what he said," Vigneault explained. "I had a conversation with Colin Campbell because I'm on speed dial lately. I just told Coley: 'I never said that, but he [Hordichuk] might have said that.' I sort of believe Boogaard on this one."

Vigneault, who claimed he has never told a player to go out and fight, hinted Hordichuk said whatever was necessary to engage Boogaard, who had run over Canuck defence-men Willie Mitchell and Alex Edler earlier in the game.

"I can't remember what I said," Hordichuk claimed sheepishly. "Guys talk sh-- all the time. You just say stuff. You know how it is when guys are chirping and things are said."

"AV is the last guy who would ever send a player [to fight]. He knows I know my role. I don't need somebody to say, 'Hey, Darcy, how about this guy?' That's what keeps me in the league."

Burrows finally addressed the media regarding his fine. He hasn't decided if it was wrong to speak out. He doesn't believe other referees will hold it against him. Mostly, he said, he's trying to move on.

So, all in all, how was his week?

"It would have been better if we'd won some hockey games," Burrows said. "It could be a lot worse. Looking at the news this morning and Haiti, we're not in that bad a place here. There's a lot worse things going on in life."

imacintyre@vancouver.sun.com

» Pavol who? | F3

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun

Turning the page on Vigneault Code

Coach's manual appears to include chapter on 'absorbing senseless beatings'

By Cam Cole, Vancouver Sun January 15, 2010

Items that may grow up to be columns, Vol. XII, Chapter 14:

DOWN WITH YOUR DUKES: It's well known that his nickname was Bam-Bam when he was earning Frequent Fighter points in the Quebec junior and minor pro leagues, and even now, nothing lights up the face of Canuck coach Alain Vigneault like a good scrap.

But weren't those back-to-back suicide missions Darcy Hordichuk and Alexandre Bolduc undertook Wednesday night in Minnesota -two willing but relative lightweight team guys challenging hairy mammoths Derek Boogaard and John Scott, who average 6-foot-7 and 257 pounds -about as ridiculous as anything you've seen so far this year?

What kind of message was that?

Bolduc, no fighter he, re-injured his shoulder trying to fend off Scott's haymakers, and it looked to me like Hordichuk escaped with his life only because Boogaard -who said Hordichuk told him that he'd been ordered to fight -took pity on him.

Tell me again, which chapter of the coach's Code of the West manual is entitled: "Absorbing Senseless Beatings."

REVERSE 3-1/2, TUCK: Viewers who happened to catch the Devils-Rangers game Tuesday night will have noticed two cartoonish dives by New York's Ryan Callahan, attempting to draw New Jersey penalties in the third period of a game tied 0-0. Referees Dan Marouelli and Justin St. Pierre simply ignored him. Didn't bite on his attempted larceny, and didn't call Callahan for unsportsmanlike conduct/diving.

Apparently, the zebras didn't want to influence the outcome of such a close, terrific game. Imagine that.

CHEAPSKATES II: He was a step late with the Canucks, but who knew Mats Sundin was also a buck shy? The big Swede narrowly averted having a story published in the Sun earlier this week, in which the Granville Island-area jeweller who made his platinum wedding ring last summer admitted he had still not been paid by the now-retired multimillionaire hockey star.

The Vancouver Sun's Brad Ziemer had the story, complete with quotes from Ralph Tober, who runs a small shop called Aurelia Jewels, expressing disbelief that Sundin -despite several e-mail reminders -had still not paid for the \$3,600 ring, which Tober made and shipped to Sweden.

"He seems like a super-nice guy when you talk to him, so I totally trusted him in terms of getting some money for the wedding band. When I e-mail him, he says 'yeah, I'm going to get to it,' " said Tober. "I don't know if he is just kind of flaky about paying his bills or what the deal is."

The story was held a day until Ziemer could call Sundin's agent, J.P. Barry, for a comment.

He reached Barry by phone Tuesday morning. Two hours later, the bill was paid. That's a lot more foot speed than Sundin ever showed with the Canucks.

TO THE POUND, DICK: Montreal lawyer Dick Pound, the Canadian IOC member and former vice-president, raised hackles in the Olympic sports community when he told B.C. business leaders the other day that figure skating was a "nightmare sport" that was still subject to biased judging despite an overhaul of the scoring system.

But Pound isn't all wrong.

There is still far too much room for personal and/or national bias in the second set of marks, the old "artistic impression" segment. And because judges can no longer be identified alongside the scores they award, except by an internal computer program which only the International Skating Union ever sees, the public has to trust the ISU to sanction judges who fudge the marks.

Kind of like trusting the NHL to do a full investigation of possible referee misconduct in the Stephane Auger-Alex Burrows fiasco.

NAPALM, ANYONE?: It becomes increasingly clear that what is needed in the NHL's ministry of justice is not just a bit of housecleaning but a flame-thrower. Everybody likes Colin Campbell, because he genuinely bleeds hockey and has paid his dues as a player and coach -- not to mention 11-plus years in his current position, The Worst Job Imaginable.

But when the rules changed, post-lockout, the mentality in the War Room remained stuck in the '70s. And the two don't go together any more.

Never mind the Neanderthal attitude on head blows, or the ridiculously subjective rulings on suspensions, based on whether the more skilled player was the perpetrator or the victim. (Still the funniest, truest lampoon on the NHL suspension methodology can be found at www.downgoesbrown.com/2009/11/NHL-suspensions.html)

Letting Auger skate away unmarked by Monday's patently personal run-in with Burrows, after a thorough NHL whitewash, just illustrates how arrogant the Toronto office has been allowed to become, and how little the league cares about transparency.

APOLOGIES NOT ACCEPTED: To summarize the limited mea culpas issued by Mark McGwire, Alex Rodriguez, Andy Pettitte, et al: "I definitely did the things you already can prove I did, and for them I apologize."

But A-Rod, we are to believe, was only on the juice in that brief period during which he can be definitely tied to it by the evidence -you know, when he was young and stupid -and Pettitte only used human growth hormone to get over an injury, never to make him stronger, and McGwire only took low doses of steroids to help prevent injuries, certainly not to give him arms the size his legs used to be.

Frankly, I was hoping Cards' manager Tony LaRussa -who wears glasses sometimes, perhaps because he is blind as a bat when it comes to the number of steroid users he's had juicing up right under his nose in Oakland and St. Louis -would get in on McGwire's Semi-True Confessions.

But LaRussa just continues to skate right past the carnage.

I wonder, doesn't it get hot inside that Teflon uniform on sweaty summer days?

ccole@vancouver.sun.com

Demitra may need a name tag to play against Pens

Injury riddled forward hints at Saturday return to lineup -- and he's still talking about suiting up for Olympics

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun Columnist January 15, 2010

Meanwhile, in hockey news regarding the hockey team ...

There has been so much controversy clouding the Vancouver Canucks this week, it's easy to miss what is happening on the ice. Like three straight losses and the imminent return of Pavol Demitra.

Remember him? Demitra? Winger from Slovakia? Out since forever? First name rhymes with Graval, which is what you need sometimes when talking about Pavol.

The Canucks' long-lost forward, out since May 2 due to a shoulder injury that required two surgeries, has been competing in battle-drills this week at practice and could return to the lineup Saturday against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

A cynic could suggest his return is as much about the Olympics -- Demitra was named captain of his national team for next month's tournament -- as the National Hockey League. And a realist could suggest it's no slam dunk that coach Alain Vigneault will displace someone from his first two forward lines to make room for the skilled 35-year-old.

"It's always an honour to play for your country," Demitra said. "This is going to be my last Olympics. I just want to be ready. I was with the [Slovak] coach on the phone every week -- how I'm feeling. I told him if I'm not going to be ready before the end of January, I didn't want to be named. But the last month, everything looked like I can be ready the next couple of days."

Demitra's history of injuries is even more impressive than his skills.

Including the Canucks' first 47 games, Demitra has missed 123 games the last five seasons.

"I got hit in my eye twice, and I was blind for a couple of days," Demitra said of his worst injury. "This is definitely the longest one. I'm happy how my shoulder is going the last four weeks. I'll just see how my shoulder is going to react tomorrow. It's the coach's call where he gonna put me; I just want to play."

WHAT WAS HE THINKING? Bolduc was hurt when he attempted to fight 6-8, 260-pound defenceman John Scott late in Wednesday's 5-2 loss to the Minnesota Wild. Bolduc had tried to engage Wild agitator Cal Clutterbuck, but instead squared off with Scott. Bolduc had never fought in an NHL regular-season game.

"He was asking me before the game about Scott, how tough was he," Canuck enforcer Darcy Hordichuk said.

"I said: 'Duker, this guy can throw punches.' He's not a guy you've heard a lot about, but you look at his fights and he has done well."

Asked why Bolduc would fight a monster, Hordichuk said because the Canucks are getting forwards back from injury and his teammate wants to stay in the NHL.

"What was he thinking?" Canuck captain Roberto Luongo said. "That's what I was thinking. That was a pretty gutsy move."

imacintyre@vancouversun.com

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun

Vigneault denies fighting charge

By Ron Sudlow, THE CANADIAN PRESS

VANCOUVER, B.C. - Having just turned the page on Alex Burrows's referee controversy, Vancouver Canucks coach Alain Vigneault was back on the phone Thursday with the NHL discussing his team's latest hot topic.

Minnesota enforcer Derek Boogard said Wednesday after the Wild's 5-2 win over Vancouver that Canuck Darcy Hordichuk told him: "The coach is making us fight you guys."

Vigneault, however, denies sending his tough guys over the boards to fight and that it wouldn't surprise him if Hordichuk told Boogard he was under coach's orders to fight, just to get the Minnesota player to square off with him.

"I had a conversation with (Colin) Campbell because I'm on (his) speed dial lately," said Vigneault, referring the NHL's top disciplinarian.

"I just told Coley I never said that, but I wouldn't be surprised that he (Hordichuk) did say that and I sort of believe Boogard on this one."

Hordichuk said after Thursday's practice he didn't recall exactly what was said before the gloves dropped but, with 72 minutes in penalties this season, he knows his role on the club.

Earlier in the week their topic of conversation was Burrows's allegation referee Stephane Auger is biased against him.

Not only did Hordichuk engage Boogard, John Scott pummelled Vancouver rookie Alex Bolduc and Canuck Tanner Glass took on Minnesota defenceman Shane Hnidy.

"The game is different now," said Vigneault. "For some players it's tougher for them to find dancing partners, and I'm sure they come up with some creative stuff and this is just one of those creative things."

Hordichuk said his decision to fight Boogard dated back to incidents in the Canucks' 4-3 win over the Wild here on Dec. 12.

On Wednesday, Boogard levelled Canuck defenceman Willie Mitchell with a clean check behind the net.

"Anytime a guy starts to run around, obviously, I know my role on this team and I was challenging him to fight in the second period from the benches," Hordichuk said.

"Alain doesn't have to send me out to fight."

Hordichuk, called for 17 penalty minutes, said he didn't know whether Boogard would accept his invitation.

"But I told the refs ahead of time I might get a two-minute instigator."

While Vigneault said he's leaning toward believing Boogard's version, he also said he believes Burrows who was fined US\$2,500 for post-game remarks after Monday's 3-2 loss to Nashville.

Burrows said Auger approached him in the pre-game warmup and said he was going to get back at him for making him look bad in a Dec. 8 game in Nashville.

The referee called a five-minute major and a game misconduct penalty on Predator Jarred Smithson for a hit on Burrows. The league rescinded the game misconduct, ruling Burrows embellished the foul.

Auger penalized Burrows during Monday's loss for diving and unsportsmanlike conduct. The Canuck forward was in the penalty box when the winning goal was scored.

Vigneault said Burrows knows he should have let the Canucks deal with the matter internally rather than complain to the media.

"I respect the league's decision and I understand their decision to fine him, but I do agree that he should have done it another way," said Vigneault.

The coach acknowledged Burrows' version of the conversation could be viewed as circumstantial.

"But at the end of the day, I believe Alex Burrows."

Vigneault said the league said Burrows didn't have much of a reaction when Auger talked with him prior to the game.

Both the player and the referee said the same thing about the incident except for the Canuck forward's assertion Auger said "I'm going to get you back," Vigneault said.

Burrows reacted strongly when the two penalties were called against him, Vigneault said, "and he did have a huge reaction after the game.

"He was very emotional and you don't make that stuff up. I understand why the league is defending their employee and we're going to defend our employee."

Burrows said in an interview that he hasn't thought about whether it was a mistake to make the public accusations.

"It's already behind me," he said. "The decision has been made."

Each of the Canucks' three losses has brought controversy.

When they dropped a 3-2 shootout decision Saturday to Calgary, Flames coach Brent Sutter complained a fan was aiming a green laser light in the eyes of Miikka Kiprusoff, his goaltender.

Oberg savours first taste of NHL

By [KEN WIEBE](#), QMI AGENCY

Evan Oberg found out reality was even better than the dream.

Last Saturday, the rookie defenceman with the Manitoba Moose was recalled by the Vancouver Canucks and played his first NHL game against the Calgary Flames before a sold-out crowd at GM Place.

"You always think about playing your first NHL game and it was cool to play it in front of that crowd in Vancouver," said Oberg, shortly after the Moose returned from a two-game series sweep over the Abbotsford Heat.

"I was always a Canucks fan (growing up), so it was pretty amazing. It's supposed to be the game of the year so far and it was unbelievably intense. The atmosphere was great and it was like a playoff game."

After Sami Salo and Aaron Rome suffered injuries, Oberg was summoned by the parent club in a move that caught him off guard.

"It was a big surprise, I didn't really see it coming," said Oberg, who has a goal and 15 points in 35 AHL games this season. "I knew a couple guys got injured, but I never knew my name was next in line."

Although he was used sparingly (eight shifts for 5:24 of ice time), that didn't take away from the overall experience.

"Jarome Iginla actually came down on a 1-on-1 with me and I stopped him, so that was good," said Oberg, who had his parents, sister and girlfriend in the stands for his NHL debut.

"I was pretty nervous the first couple of shifts, but after that, it felt a lot better," he said. "It was great and I'll never forget it."

Oberg fully understands that at this time last year, he was playing NCAA hockey for the University of Minnesota-Duluth Bulldogs and 12 months later the undrafted free agent signing was suiting up for his first NHL game.

"It's hard to believe," said Oberg. "I always set my goals pretty high, so although it's a surprise it's something you hope is going to happen. It's nice to get a game in your first year."

Oberg also realizes there is plenty for him to work on and that's why he wasn't about to fall prey to any sort of letdown when he returned to the Moose for a pair of games against the Abbotsford Heat.

"I'm just trying to be a complete player, in the defensive zone and the offensive," said Oberg, who had two assists in the series sweep.

Moose head coach Scott Arniel believes that after an inconsistent start to the campaign, Oberg is rounding nicely into form.

"He came back (from Vancouver) extremely confident and did lots of good things," said Arniel, who paired him with veteran Mathieu Schneider the past two games.

"He's stepped up and has played really well the past few weeks."

The Moose face the Milwaukee Admirals tonight at tomorrow at the MTS Centre.

Tomorrow, the Moose plan to honour St. Malo product Travis Hamonic as part of Go Canada Night.

ken.wiebe@sunmedia.ca

Alain Vigneault backs up Burrows

Matthew Sekeres

VANCOUVER — From Friday's Globe and Mail Published on Friday, Jan. 15, 2010

Vancouver Canucks head coach Alain Vigneault says he believes Alex Burrows's version of a pregame conversation with referee Stéphane Auger this week, and vows that the team will back its player as strongly as the [NHL](#) backs its official.

The league said yesterday that Auger was wrong to approach Burrows and open old wounds before Monday's game against the Nashville Predators. But Colin Campbell, the league's director of hockey operations, contends that Auger was not out to settle an individual score, despite Burrows's accusations to the contrary.

"I think the circumstantial evidence proves that Alex was right," Vigneault said. "I respect the league's decision, and I understand their decision to fine him. I do agree that he should have done it another way. But at the end of the day, I believe Alex Burrows."

Campbell said it was "inappropriate" for officials to frustrate players and coaches by raising historical grievances in warm-up periods, but the NHL's chief disciplinarian stopped short of endorsing a blanket rule against pregame conversations. He said Auger should have picked a better time to warn Burrows.

Burrows was fined \$2,500 (U.S.) for accusing Auger of bias following the 3-2 loss to Nashville. The 28-year-old forward was called for two marginal penalties in the third period, one of which led to the game-winning goal.

Afterward, Burrows said Auger approached him before the game and revealed plans to get even for a run-in between the two on Dec. 8. The league ruled Wednesday that the conversation could not be independently verified and that Auger, who has not been disciplined, was beyond reproach.

The official denied making the remarks when questioned by the NHL.

"That's fine," said Burrows, who has been muzzled by the Canucks. "The decision has been made. We're moving on."

In interviews yesterday, Campbell said Burrows did not physically react during the conversation with Auger, which was caught by cameras, and never mentioned Auger's alleged threat until being called for the penalties. Vigneault said Burrows was stunned by Auger's frankness, and revealed the comments only after he felt wronged by a phantom interference penalty with less than five minutes remaining.

"It was very emotional, and you don't make that stuff up," Vigneault said of Burrows's postgame tirade. "Now, I understand why the league is defending their employee, but we're going to defend our employee. And the circumstantial evidence in my mind, and in our organization's mind, we believe Alex."

In the Dec. 8 game, Auger assessed Predators forward Jerred Smithson a five-minute penalty and a game misconduct for a hit on Burrows.

The NHL later rescinded Smithson's misconduct because it ruled that Burrows fooled Auger with an embellished reaction. The referee was called before NHL director of officiating Terry Gregson and told that it should have been a two-minute penalty.

Vigneault denies telling player to fight

Canucks coach disagrees with Darcy Hordichuk's claim that Vancouver skaters were being told to scrap during Wednesday's loss to Minnesota

Matthew Sekeres

VANCOUVER — From Friday's Globe and Mail Published on Friday, Jan. 15, 2010

Vancouver Canucks head coach Alain Vigneault and [NHL](#) disciplinarian Colin Campbell have each other on speed dial this week, and while the former wasn't willing to indict Alex Burrows, he testified against another player yesterday.

Minnesota tough guy Derek Boogaard told the Minneapolis Star-Tribune that Canucks enforcer Darcy Hordichuk said "the coach is making us fight you guys," during the late stages of a 5-2 Wild victory on Wednesday.

The subject of management instructing players to fight is a sensitive matter with the Canucks. Vigneault said he did not tell Hordichuk to fight, but believes his player used the big, bad boss to goad the big, bad Bogeyman.

"I told Coley that I believe Boogaard," Vigneault said. "It wouldn't surprise me if Hordi told him 'Coach told me I have to fight.' It must have been a real intellectual conversation."

Hordichuk admitted that he was not under orders, and said he couldn't remember his exact words to Boogaard. He conceded that he intended to start a fight, and even told an official that he was willing to take an instigator penalty.

The teams fought three times after the Wild took a three-goal lead midway through the third period, and Canucks forward Alexander Bolduc reinjured a shoulder in a lopsided fight with Minnesota's John Scott.

Hordichuk and Bolduc are both six inches shorter, and 50 pounds lighter, than Boogaard and Scott. Bolduc is likely to miss a home game against the Pittsburgh Penguins tomorrow.

In March of 2004, former Canuck Todd Bertuzzi began a fight with Colorado Avalanche forward Steve Moore, an unwilling combatant who suffered three fractured vertebrae and a concussion. Moore, who injured Vancouver's Markus Naslund with a questionable hit three weeks earlier, is suing the Canucks, Bertuzzi and former head coach Marc Crawford for more than \$38-million.

Last year, Bertuzzi filed court papers alleging Crawford shared some responsibility for the attack after telling players that Moore should "pay the price" for the hit on Naslund.

Then last season, Canucks defenceman Shane O'Brien said that general manager Mike Gillis told him to fight more during a series of meetings between management and players. Gillis denied the accusation.

"[Boogaard] wasn't looking at me and I wasn't sure he was going to fight me," Hordichuk said. "I was challenging him in the second period to fight, from the bench, and it was just a matter of time before we were going to fight. Alain doesn't have to send me out to fight."

HORDICHUK DENIES BOOGAARD'S ACCUSATION OF ORDERS TO FIGHT TSN.CA STAFF

Another night, another potential controversy for the Vancouver Canucks.

Following Wednesday night's 5-2 victory over the Vancouver Canucks, Minnesota Wild tough guy [Derek Boogaard](#) told reporter Michael Russo of the Minnesota Star-Tribune that Canucks coach Alain Vigneault had sent his players out to deliberately start fights with the Wild.

The Star-Tribune is reporting that just prior to his third-period fight with Boogaard, Canucks forward [Darcy Hordichuk](#) told him: "The coach is making us fight you guys."

On Thursday, Hordichuk denied Boogard's allegations, saying he'd been trying to fight him since the second period after a cheap shot on defenceman [Willie Mitchell](#). Hordichuk also said he knows his role in the league and no coach needs to tell him what that is.

Canucks' head coach Alain Vigneault also denied giving instructions for Hordichuk to fight a much bigger Boogaard.

Just 20 seconds after the Boogaard-Hordichuk fight, [Alexandre Bolduc](#) challenged [John Scott](#) in a completely one-sided fight in which Bolduc reportedly suffered a shoulder injury and looked dizzy as he left the ice.

There was one final fight in the third period as just three minutes after the Bolduc-Scott tilt, the Canucks' [Tanner Glass](#) fought [Shane Hnidy](#).

CANUCKS WRAP UP WEEK OF HEADLINES AND CONTROVERSY TSN.CA STAFF

It has been an eventful week for the Vancouver Canucks.

From "Laser-gate", to the [Alex Burrows](#) comments made Monday night about referee Stephane Auger, to Wednesday's [Derek Boogaard](#)-Alain Vigneault drama, controversy found the Canucks in each of their games this week.

The team's first distraction came last Saturday against the Calgary Flames at General Motors Place. The issue arose in the aftermath of the contest when an unidentified fan tried to distract Flames netminder [Miikka Kiprusoff](#) with a green laser pointer directed towards his eyes.

"It was going on all night," Flames head coach Brent Sutter said following the game. "It was brought to the attention of the refs and security, and it's hard to believe that can go on for 60 minutes in a hockey game and it's not located and not found."

The fans' effort was not especially helpful, as the Canucks were outshot 40-21 and lost in the shootout.

Two days later, the [Alex Burrows](#)-Stephane Auger controversy made front page news.

According to the Canucks forward, he and Auger had a conversation ahead of the Predators game where the referee allegedly warned Burrows that he would "get him" because of an incident in a game last month in which Auger felt that Burrows embellished a hit by Nashville's [Jerred Smithson](#).

"It was personal. It started in warmup, before the anthem," Burrows said of Auger's penalty calling following the contest. "(Auger) came over to me and he said I made him look bad in Nashville on the Smithson hit and he said he was going to get me back tonight."

Auger assessed a five-minute charging major and game misconduct to Smithson, but upon review the league later rescinded the penalties. NHL senior executive vice-president Colin Campbell slapped Burrows with a \$2,500 fine for his allegations while Auger walked away with nothing, with the league claiming a lack of evidence to prove anything differently.

"I respect the league's decision and I understand their decision to fine him, but I do agree that he (Burrows) should have done it another way," said Canucks head coach Alain Vigneault.

"But at the end of the day, I believe [Alex Burrows](#)," added Vigneault. "When a referee goes to a player prior to the game, and talks about an incident that happened over a month before, and says exactly the same thing that Alex said, except for the fact that 'I'm going to get you back'...it was very emotional and you don't make that stuff up."

And not to be outdone by newsmakers from earlier in the week, Minnesota Wild tough guy [Derek Boogaard](#) told a reporter that coach Vigneault instructed his players to fight in the late stages of Wednesday's 5-2 loss to the Wild. According to Boogaard, Canucks enforcer [Darcy Hordichuk](#) told him: "The coach is making us fight you guys."

On Thursday, Hordichuk denied Boogaard's allegations, saying he'd been trying to fight him since the second period after a cheap shot on defenceman [Willie Mitchell](#).

"Anytime a guy starts to run around, obviously, I know my role on this team and I was challenging him to fight in the second period from the benches," Hordichuk said. "Alain doesn't have to send me out to fight."

In regard to his anticipation that a fight with Boogaard might happen, Hordichuk said "I told the refs ahead of time I might get a two-minute instigator."

Vigneault also denied giving instructions for Hordichuk to fight a much bigger Boogaard.

"I just told (Colin Campbell) I never said that, but I wouldn't be surprised that he (Hordichuk) did say that and I sort of believe Boogaard on this one," explained Vigneault.

"I'm sure things are said on the ice and they get misinterpreted, and Hordichuk might have said something like 'I've got to prove to my coach and I've got to go here', or something like that," said Canucks defenceman [Shane O'Brien](#). "But I know I've never heard Vigneault say anything about having to go out and fight someone."

With all these sidebar stories plaguing the Canucks, the most important issue at hand is the club's current record. They are riding a three-game losing streak and are just four points up on ninth place in the Western Conference with 56 points.

On top of that, star netminder [Roberto Luongo](#) has been playing poorly of late, posting a 0-2-0 record, 4.43 goals against average and .818 save percentage in the last two outings. He was beat on the first two shots he faced in the first period of Wednesday's loss to the Wild and was yanked after allowing three goals on the first three shots he saw in the third. He finished with 14 saves on 19 shots.

From here, the Canucks return home to play the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday and then get three days off before they play the Oilers in Edmonton next Wednesday. They then play four consecutive home games before embarking on their longest road trip of the season, which includes eight games over a two-week period leading up to the Olympic break.

• **Leave it on the ice**

[Nick Kypreos](#) | January 14, 2010

- Words exchanged on the ice are a part of the game as much as anything. From players, coaches, referees, even fans, everyone's got something to say.

I never minded the gamesmanship when it came to a war of words among players. It was always about who could get under the skin of an opponent and give their team an edge.

I'll never forget my first NHL game when a 10-year veteran with a clean-cut public image accused another player of having the ugliest wife in the league. My jaw dropped. I couldn't believe my ears. Even players' wives weren't off limits? When I asked the veteran about it after the games, he said simply, "Whatever it takes to win."

Throwing guys off their game is a philosophy that's made the likes of Dale Hunter, Matthew Barnaby, [Darcy Tucker](#), [Sean Avery](#) and countless others multimillionaires.

(What actually bothered me most during my career was listening to certain coaches or mouthy trainers pipe up from the safe confines of their team bench without ever having to fight a battle of their own. Can you imagine hearing from a guy who never played the game at that level of intensity questioning the bravery of guy who does? That always ticked me off.)

Referees and players never had a problem conversing on the ice. Any time: outside of dressing rooms, during TV timeouts, just after a period ends, it didn't really matter. Quick conversations happen all the time.

I always believed hockey players and game officials have had a greater rapport than any other sport. From unrelated topics like horse racing, football, even John Garrett's favourite soap opera "The Young and the Restless", to heated game disagreements like "why did you screw me over in the second period with that tripping call?"

Regardless of what was said most nights, the thing that remained consistent was that once the game was over, everything said between an official and a player was happily accepted in the heat of battle. Even if your night ended with a double game misconduct and you screaming at the official on the way to the showers what you thought of his mother, it never carried over to the next game with the same venom it did for [Alex Burrows](#).

To accuse an official of sabotaging a game all for the sake of a personal vendetta is as serious as it gets.

Why didn't Burrows tell a coach or teammate right away? I know I would have. I also know I'd never go public with my accusation without consulting my coach or general manager first.

So what is the truth in all of this? Safe to say we'll never know; only Burrows and referee Stephane Auger really know for sure.

What we do know is Burrows' accusation comes with no one to corroborate his story. The onus isn't on Auger to prove he didn't say it; it's on Burrows to prove that he did. And sadly for him, he can't do that anymore than you or I could watching from our couch last Monday night.

Pittsburgh Penguins Sportscan:

510048 Pittsburgh Penguins

Fleury's big saves fuel Penguins' late rally

By Rob Rossi

EDMONTON - Before a couple of game-changing saves by goalie Marc-Andre Fleury early in the third period, the Penguins had already decided they wouldn't lose Thursday night at Rexall Place.

"In the room, second intermission, some guys talked - and it was stuff that needed to be said; we said it in a positive way," said winger Pascal Dupuis, whose 11th goal midway through final period staked the Penguins their only lead in a 3-2 win over the Edmonton Oilers.

"(Veteran winger) Billy Guerin standing up in the room and saying the right things; guys were following."

The Penguins followed a familiar formula for their third win in four games and second in a row: Back up Fleury's big saves with a bust-through-the-door finish.

With the Penguins down, 2-0, early in the third period, Fleury poke-checked the puck off the stick of Oilers right winger Dustin Penner, who had broke in on a long breakaway. A couple of Edmonton shifts later, Fleury denied the Oilers a goal on a 2-on-1 after an offensive-zone turnover by Penguins winger Tyler Kennedy.

Kennedy made up for that mistake. He scored his ninth goal at 3:18, and the Penguins were within a 2-1 score. Winger Matt Cooke pulled them even, 2-2, at 6:48 with his ninth tally - a power-play goal, which he joked was his first since playing with Vancouver three years ago.

Less than four minutes after Cooke's tally, Dupuis put the Penguins in front for the first time, and for good.

"We talked amongst ourselves after the second, but not much needed to be said," Penguins defenseman Mark Eaton said. "That poke-check save from Flower ... it gave us a chance."

Fleury made it with a cut left ring finger, which was injured on a shot in the second period.

That frustrated him, as did a late second-period collision with Oilers center Robert Nilsson, who crashed hard through the goal crease and into Fleury with 24 seconds before the final intermission.

Fleury immediately jumped atop of Nilsson in a rare show of physical force from the normally good-natured goalie.

"I think the momentum shift (was) 'Flower' going out and being aggressive on the guy," Cooke said.

A couple of power-play goals put Edmonton on top in the second period, and center Patrick O'Sullivan was a determining factor in both scores. He set up center Andre Cogliano's goal early in the third and defenseman Lubomir Visnovsky's tally midway through the period, which pushed the Oilers ahead, 2-0.

The Penguins (30-18-1, 61 points) earned a rare win when neither centers Sidney Crosby nor Evgeni Malkin recorded points.

Of course, the Penguins' No. 3 pivot is a power in his own right; and center Jordan Staal recorded primary assists on every goal. It was his first three-helper game in four NHL seasons.

"The Nightmare Line" of Cooke, Staal and Kennedy combined for six points.

"As a team we know when those guys aren't going, we still can win games," Staal said. "It's always a great thing to know that we have that depth."

They also have a chance to close a brutal five-game trip through four time zones at 4-1-0 with a win Saturday night at Vancouver.

For that possibility they can thank Fleury, who has resumed playing brilliantly in the net. He turned aside 33 shots against Edmonton a night after stopping 37 in a win at Calgary. Fleury opened the trip with 42 saves last Saturday at Toronto.

"Those two saves in the third - when you talk about what Marc-Andre Fleury has done at different time in his career; it's not always the greatest, but he comes up with big saves when his team needs them," coach Dan Bylsma said. "That's what he's always managed to do for his team, and he did it."

Tribune Review LOADED 01.15.2010

510049 Pittsburgh Penguins

Mellon Arena nostalgia kept in check

By Jeremy Boren

Consol Energy Center, under construction across Centre Avenue from the Igloo, is slated to be finished in mid-July with a grand opening before the puck drops on the 2010-11 season.

Nostalgia for the "Igloo" is running high in its final season, but fond memories are no reason to spare Mellon Arena from demolition once the Pittsburgh Penguins' new home is ready, a top team executive said Thursday.

"It's not that we're not nostalgic about the arena, it's just that it has outlived its usefulness," said team President David Morehouse. "The memories will last forever, but the arena shouldn't."

Not everyone agrees, and some say the team backed away from creating merchandise and other reminders of its final season, such as a patch for players' uniforms.

Morehouse acknowledged the patch was scrapped, but said that's because the team wore patches during the 2007-08 season to honor Pittsburgh's 250th anniversary and didn't want to use a similar decoration again.

He said the team is planning a farewell celebration that will feature appearances by yet-to-be-named former players, a commemorative book and, possibly, a final concert by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra -- a tip of the hat to one of the arena's original tenants, the Civic Light Opera.

"If they don't want to keep it, why would they want to make a big deal about (Mellon Arena)?" said Downtown architect Rob Pfaffman. He envisions transforming the 49-year-old, domed arena into a partially enclosed city park with a skating rink and room for retail and residential development.

A group on the social-networking Web site Facebook has amassed nearly 3,000 "fans" under the banner of "Reuse the Igloo," which Pfaffman created.

"There's nothing like it, and once we tear it down, we can't get it back," said Penguins fan Kristin Carney of Murrysville, who belongs to "Reuse the Igloo." In addition to attending hockey games there, she took her 7-year-old son last year to see the Ringling Bros. Circus.

"To me, this isn't just about the Penguins," she said.

The arena, the oldest venue in the National Hockey League, opened in 1961. The Penguins began calling it home in 1967.

The team and the arena's owner, the Sports & Exhibition Authority, are trying to appear to have an "open mind" about preserving the arena, but it may be too late, said state Sen. Wayne Fontana, D-Brookline, a member of the authority board.

"It's a discussion that would certainly change everything if it got some legs," Fontana said of those who want to save the arena.

The first of several meetings about the area's development -- hosted by the SEA and Moon contractor Michael Baker Corp. -- is set for Tuesday in Mellon Arena. Mary Conturo, executive director of the SEA, said no plans have been made to memorialize Mellon Arena and that "we just haven't started thinking in those terms yet."

Morehouse said the team is paying homage to the only home the Penguins have ever known.

"If we were a losing hockey team and had a bunch of old players, we'd be commemorating the arena every game," Morehouse said. "But the fact is, we went to the Stanley Cup Finals two years in a row, and we have a very young team. So we chose to focus on the future."

In December, the Penguins sent metal Christmas ornaments stamped with "Mellon Arena" and "Final Season" around an image of the arena with Downtown buildings in the background. The ornaments are a top seller on the team Web site at \$19.99 a piece.

During home games, the arena's big screens show video clips dubbed "Mellon Arena Memories," Morehouse said. Game programs feature articles on the history of what was known as the Civic Arena before Mellon Bank paid \$18 million in 1999 to buy the naming rights for 10 years.

The Penguins have 18 regular-season home games remaining and 15 away games.

Should the Pens make the finals again, the latest possible game would be the weekend of June 18, said Jay Roberts, general manager with arena operator SMG World.

He said there are one or two other events being scheduled for late June or July.

After demolition -- expected in 2011 -- the Penguins have an agreement with the SEA to develop 28 acres over 10 years. Morehouse said the Penguins want to put in a mix of retail and residential and restore the part of the Lower Hill District street grid that building the arena eliminated.

"We hope once we focus on it that we'll be able to put something there that the city will be proud of," he said.

Tribune Review LOADED 01.15.2010

510050 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins take a backseat to Olympic Torch

By Rob Rossi

EDMONTON - The Olympic Torch made its way through Edmonton and was presented to fans at Rexall Place on Thursday night before the Penguins played the Oilers. Oilers coach Pat Quinn, who steered Team Canada to a men's hockey gold medal at the 2002 Olympics, was part of a pregame ceremony that included introductions of 2010 Olympic hockey players from both teams.

" Penguins goalie Brent Johnson (lower-body injury) was placed on the injured reserve list Wednesday, retroactive to Saturday. Johnson last practiced Tuesday prior to the Penguins' loss at Minnesota. John Curry, recalled from the AHL on Monday, served as the Penguins backup goalie for a third consecutive game.

" Defenseman Brooks Orpik (undisclosed injury) missed a third consecutive game, and his status for Saturday at Vancouver is unknown. Orpik's status is day-to-day. He was injured last Saturday in a win at Toronto. Ben Lovejoy, recalled from the AHL on Monday, replaced him in the lineup against Edmonton.

" Winger Luca Caputi and defenseman Martin Skoula were healthy scratches for a second straight game for the Penguins. The Oilers scratched centers Shawn Horcoff and Gilbert Brule.

" Penguins regulars did not participate in a morning practice at Rexall Place, as a combination of travel and the condensed schedule continued to prevent coach Dan Bylsma from finding ideal ice time for his club. Upon their arrival in Vancouver today the Penguins will have entered their fourth time zone on this 11-day road trip.

" A Jan. 31 rematch of the past two Stanley Cup Finals will be broadcast on NBC and its local affiliates. The Detroit Red Wings will visit Mellon Arena to play the Penguins for the first time since losing Game 6 of the 2009 Final. The Red Wings also lost Game 7 at Detroit, as the Penguins won the Cup for a third time, and first since 1992. Time for the game Jan. 31 is to be determined.

Tribune Review LOADED 01.15.2010

510051 Pittsburgh Penguins

Gonchar extension talk could heat up 'soon'

By Rob Rossi

EDMONTON - The next couple of weeks could produce movement regarding talks between the Penguins and defenseman Sergei Gonchar, who can become an unrestricted free agent on July 1.

Gonchar's agent, JP Barry, said Thursday he plans to speak with his client at the conclusion of the Penguins' five-game road trip, which ends Saturday at Vancouver, before meeting with Penguins general manager Ray Shero.

"We haven't really agreed on terms or dollar aspect, but the time for that is soon," Barry said, adding that he wants to discuss numbers with Shero as early as next week for the first time since late September.

Barry described dialogue with the Penguins as "comfortable." Talks between the parties have been mostly exploratory since a meeting early in training camp. A week later, Shero and Barry agreed to delay additional discussions until after Jan. 1. Talks since have been limited.

Shero said Wednesday that contract talks with Gonchar "will be an ongoing thing."

Added Shero: "He wants to be here, and we'd like to have him here."

Barry's last big negotiation with Shero was Penguins center Evgeni Malkin's five-year extension worth \$43.5 million in July 2008. Barry's reputation around the NHL is that of an affable but tough negotiator. Shero described him as "experienced."

Gonchar, who will turn 36 in April, counts \$5 million against the \$56.8 million NHL salary cap this season. The Penguins are committed to roughly \$41 million against the to-be-determined 2010-11 cap - though Gonchar is one of three current regulars on defense set for unrestricted free agency, and Kris Letang will command a considerable raise on his \$835,000 average annual salary.

Letang, 23 in April, can become a restricted free agent this summer, and the Penguins view him as their long-term No. 1 defenseman even though talks with his agent, Kent Hughes, have not produced significant movement on an extension, Shero said.

Hughes could not be reached for comment.

Term is a sticking point in the next contracts for Gonchar and Letang, and Gonchar's age makes for a possible stickier situation regarding his potential deal with the cap-strapped Penguins.

Under the current bargaining agreement negotiated between the NHL and its Players' Association in 2005, players who sign contracts before their 35th birthday will not count against future salary caps if they retire or are granted permission to play in Europe while still under term. A player cannot sign an extension until the final year of his contract.

Gonchar had scored seven goals and recorded 27 points before the Penguins played at Edmonton last night. He paced team defensemen in both offensive categories despite playing in the fewest games among regulars (32) because of various injuries.

Prior to last season, Gonchar played at least 75 games in six of seven seasons. However, injuries have limited him to 58 games the past two seasons.

Gonchar will play for Russia at the Vancouver Olympics next month. Barry and Shero are scheduled to attend those games.

"Normally, it would (stall talks)," Barry said of the NHL's two-week break for the Olympics. "But with Ray and me both there ... maybe the Olympics will help in this case."

The Penguins current nucleus of young stars - centers Malkin, Sidney Crosby and Jordan Staal and goalie Marc-Andre Fleury - have all signed long-term contracts or extension at less than perceived market value, starting with Crosby in July 2007.

There is no indication Gonchar will follow that trend. This could be his last long-term NHL contract.

Gonchar has declined comment regarding his contract status, offering only that he "would like to stay" with the Penguins, for whom he is alternate captain.

Tribune Review LOADED 01.15.2010

510052 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins come back to beat Oilers, 3-2

By Shelly Anderson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

EDMONTON, Alberta -- The Penguins could toss out the first two periods of their game against Edmonton last night.

In fact, that's pretty much what they did.

They erased a two-goal deficit in the third period for a 3-2 win against the Oilers at Rexall Place, but the turnaround started with the players at a place not seen by the public.

"In the [locker] room. Second intermission," said winger Pascal Dupuis, who got the winning goal at 10:30 of the third period when a pass from behind the net by Jordan Staal glanced into the net off Dupuis' right shin pad.

"Some guys talked. We stayed positive, and there was stuff that needed to be said. We said it in a positive way. You've got a guy like [39-year-old winger] Billy Guerin that's getting up in the room and saying the right things, guys are following."

Goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury held the fort, making some strong saves in the first two periods but reserving the biggest stop among his 33 in the first minute of the third period.

With the teams playing four on four, Edmonton's Dustin Penner bore down on Fleury on a breakaway. The goalie sprawled to his left to make a poke check and prevent his team from falling into a 3-0 hole.

"No one really played well, to be honest [except] Fleury -- he's always good though -- the first two periods," said Staal, who assisted on all three of his team's goals. "We just shook it off and said we've got to change it in the third."

It's one way to win -- and do it against a team that is now 1-12-1 in its past 14 games -- but it's not a blueprint the Penguins want to hang on the wall.

"It's definitely not a good thing," Staal said of the slow start. "We've got to be a team that comes out strong the first period every time. We haven't been doing that as of late, and it's been catching up to us. We can't do this every night. It's something we've got to look into."

They can look to Fleury, especially lately. He played his second good game in as many nights -- he was a key in a 3-1 victory Wednesday at Calgary -- and did it for more than half the game with an injured left ring finger after a slap shot by the Oilers' Ryan Potulny caught him on an unprotected part of his glove hand.

"Tonight wasn't easy," Fleury said. "They gave us a good challenge. Maybe we weren't playing our best hockey in the first two [periods], but in the third guys played very well, played very hard, and we got three goals out of it."

The Oilers got both of their goals on the power play.

The first came in a five-on-three. The Penguins got 1:34 into the two minutes of being shorthanded before Andrew Cogliano, parked to the right of the net, took a pass across from Patrick O'Sullivan, who was at the bottom of the opposite circle. Fleury slid to his left to make a toe save on Cogliano, but Cogliano got his own rebound and lifted it into the net for a 1-0 Edmonton lead.

Edmonton added a second power-play goal, this one five-on-four, at 11:53 of the second period, on Lubomir Visnovsky's shot from the center point that dipped under Fleury's glove for a 2-0 Oilers lead.

Fleury might have helped spark his team in advance of its locker room chat with 24.5 seconds left in the second period. Edmonton's Robert Nilsson drove the net and bowled over Fleury, knocking off the net and ending up inside it. Fleury turned and jumped on Nilsson.

"I've been run over a couple times, and today -- I don't know why -- I decided that it's enough," Fleury said. "Make them think next time maybe."

Nilsson drew a goaltender interference penalty, and Fleury a roughing call, leaving the teams at four skaters a side.

When the four-on-four play resumed in the third period, Fleury made the big poke-check save on Penner.

At 3:18 of the third period, Tyler Kennedy broke up rookie Devan Dubnyk's shutout attempt and cut Edmonton's lead to 2-1 when he ripped a shot from the right dot that went in off the goaltender.

It was Kennedy's second goal in as many games.

The Penguins' second power-play unit got the tying goal at 6:48 of the third period. Staal rang a shot off the right post, and Matt Cooke got the rebound and backhanded it past Dubnyk to make it 2-2.

By overcoming the slow start, the Penguins improved to 3-1 on a season-long five-game trip that concludes tomorrow at Vancouver. Coming into the trip, they were 1-6 in their previous seven games.

Post Gazette LOADED 01.15.2010

510053 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins Notebook: Talks target Gonchar, Letang

By Shelly Anderson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

EDMONTON, Alberta -- General manager Ray Shero has begun contract talks involving Sergei Gonchar and Kris Letang and is optimistic about keeping both defensemen despite a tight salary cap.

Gonchar, 35, the team's top defenseman and quarterback of the power play, can become an unrestricted free agent July 1 if not re-signed. He has a salary cap hit of \$5 million this season. Letang, 22, could become a restricted free agent that day. His cap hit is \$835,000.

Shero indicated he expects the talks to go on for some time.

"With Sergei, it will be an ongoing thing," Shero said. "I think he wants to be here; we'd like to have him here."

Gonchar, who has missed 16 games because of two injuries this season, had seven goals and 27 points - tops among Penguins defensemen -- going into last night's game.

Letang had two goals and 14 points in 39 games.

"That's similar," Shero said of progress with Letang. "There's been some discussions.

Fitzgerald behind the bench

Tom Fitzgerald is starting to feel as if his career is getting back to normal -- now that he can travel again.

The Penguins' assistant to the general manager stepped away from the front office to be an assistant coach last season down the stretch and through the playoffs to the Stanley Cup championship.

Fitzgerald returned to a management position after that but hit a major snag when he got a severe cut on his foot in a swimming accident in August. Several medical procedures later, he is off crutches and able to expand his work sphere beyond driving distances from his home area of Boston.

He has added amateur scouting to his list of assignments, which also includes pro scouting, monitoring the club's prospects and joining the Penguins occasionally to work with them.

Fitzgerald joined the team in Calgary, a trip that already had been planned, and coach Dan Bylsma invited him to work behind the bench Wednesday night during a 3-1 Penguins win. Assistant coach Mike Yeo is not traveling right now because of some medical concerns.

Extreme marriage proposal

A woman in the stands in Calgary not only brought a sign asking Penguins center Sidney Crosby to marry her -- those turn up frequently where the unmarried star plays -- but also wore a white wedding gown.

Crosby noticed.

"She took it to the next level," he said.

"I hadn't seen that before. I'd seen a few signs, but not the whole dress and all. I don't usually see that stuff, to be honest, but I can honestly say I didn't miss that one. It was interesting."

His response to the proposal?

" 'No' would be the answer. Sorry."

Quinn a Crosby fan

Edmonton coach Pat Quinn, who along with Wayne Gretzky decided against including an 18-year-old Crosby on the 2006 Team Canada squad that did not medal at the Turin Olympics, now is one of Crosby's staunchest fans.

"He is a terrific athlete," Quinn said. "I just love watching him play. Right now he's my favorite as far as hockey players in the National Hockey League and guys who will carry our flame for our Canadian hopes [at the upcoming Vancouver Olympics].

"You can go back to guys on the old Leafs, then you got Gordie [Howe] and [Bobby] Hull, then you get [Bobby] Orr and Gretzky and [Mario] Lemieux. This kid is the face of our game -- and he's a good face."

Tip-ins

The Penguins placed Brent Johnson, the regular backup goaltender, on injured reserve, retroactive to Saturday. Under NHL rules, he would be eligible to play this Saturday at Vancouver. Bylsma has described Johnson as being out on a day-to-day basis with an undisclosed injury. ... The Penguins' game Jan. 31 at Detroit has been picked up by NBC. No time has been announced.

Post Gazette LOADED 01.15.2010

510054 Pittsburgh Penguins

Game against Red Wings switched to NBC

By Shelly Anderson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

EDMONTON, Alberta -- The Penguins' game Jan. 31 against Detroit will be aired by NBC, the NHL announced. There is no start time listed yet.

The game, which is scheduled for Detroit, pits the contestants in the past two Stanley Cup playoff finals. Detroit won in 2008, the Penguins in 2009.

Post Gazette LOADED 01.15.2010