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National Hockey League Cancels 2004-2005 Season

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The major stumbling block to an agreement was the NHL's insistence on a team salary cap. The final offer from the players' union relented to a cap. While the players' offer did include a 24 percent rollback in salaries, the offer was substantially above what the league said it could afford.

Speaking at a news conference in New York on Wednesday, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said the union still does not understand the league's financial situation.

"The union has constantly said they do not trust our numbers. We have asked them for five years to audit our books. And they have refused. If the party you are negotiating over, in terms of how to create a business structure that works, does not know your numbers [or] does not acknowledge your numbers [then] it is pretty difficult to come to an agreement," he said.

A few hours later, players' union executive director Bob Goodenow stressed that the players had given a lot of ground in negotiations, including agreeing to the idea of a salary cap. "The players proactively offered proposals and initiated talks with the league to keep the game on the ice long before the commissioner triggered the second lockout during his tenure. Keep one thing perfectly clear, the players never asked for more money. They just asked for a marketplace to exist," he said.

The NHL and players' union traded a flurry of proposals and letters late Tuesday, but could never agree on a cap. The players proposed \$49 million per team while team owners said they could only go as high as \$42.5 million. But other conditions made the offers farther apart than they appeared.

With the season now gone, commissioner Bettman says labor negotiations will have to resume from a different point.

"Nobody knows what the damage to the sport will be. Nobody knows what revenues we can count on or predict on. We are going to have to earn back the trust and love and affection of everybody who is associated with the game. And so we are going to have to look at a completely different economic model. The best deal that was on the table is now gone," he said.

An NHL Stanley Cup champion had been crowned every year since 1893, with the exception of 1919 when the finals were cancelled after five games due to a flu epidemic. The lockout that started on September 16 ultimately wiped out the entire 1,230-game schedule and the playoffs. The NHL's last game came in June, when the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Calgary Flames, 2-1, in Game Seven to win the Stanley Cup.

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It was 25 years ago that the U.S. Olympic ice hockey team pulled off a monumental upset of the mighty Soviet Union at the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics. Nearly all of the players from that famous team will be in Lake Placid, New York, for a celebration of their feat Wednesday night. The small upstate New York town of Lake Placid has been marking the 25th anniversary of its hosting of the Winter Olympics this month. It recreated the opening...

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The National Hockey League will allow league personnel to take part in the upcoming World Ice Hockey Championships in Austria, even if the lockout that canceled the season is still ongoing. The championships are put on by the International Ice Hockey Federation. Usually, a handful of players join their national teams if their professional clubs fail to reach the Stanley Cup playoffs, or they join once their NHL clubs are eliminated from the playoffs. NHL chief legal...

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NHL, Player's Union to Explore Strategies for 2005-2006 Season

The National Hockey League's Board of Governors and the Players' Union (NHLPA) will hold separate meetings on Tuesday to discuss strategies to restart play next season. The Board of Governors meeting will take place in New York with all 30 team owners and many general managers expected to attend. The Players' Association is expecting over 100 members at its meeting in Toronto. The meetings come less than two weeks after the 2004-2005 NHL season was...