

PRO BASKETBALL

In Portland, Where Blazers Reign, Lockout Leaves a Void

By KEN BELSON

PORTLAND, Ore. — A short walk from the Rose Garden, the home of the Portland Trail Blazers, a few customers trickled into the Spirit of '77 sports bar after it opened Thursday afternoon. They ordered pints of beer, hot dogs and other snacks. Some played a mini basketball game as hockey games blared on the large televisions.

The only thing missing was the Blazers, who were supposed to play their home opener Thursday against the Denver Nuggets. If the game had not been canceled because of the N.B.A. lockout, hundreds of fans would have been at the bar in Blazers jerseys, downing food and drinks before heading to the arena, or hunkering down to watch the game on television.

With the lockout in its fifth month and every game in November wiped out, cities like Portland are getting a taste of life without their hometown basketball team. While fans in New York, Chicago or Dallas can turn to the N.F.L. and the N.H.L., the lack of N.B.A. games has left a larger-than-normal void in places like Portland, Salt Lake City and Oklahoma City, where basketball is pretty much the only professional game in town during the winter. The lockout has started to pinch local businesses that depend on the teams, as well as city and state governments that rely on the tax revenue generated by the players, teams and their fans.

"This is terrible," said Timothy Davey, who runs the Spirit of '77, which refers to the year that the Blazers won their only N.B.A. title. "Our vitality is at stake."

Accurate figures on how much money is being lost because of the N.B.A. lockout are hard to come by. But in Portland, fans, businesses, the Blazers and visiting teams spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a game during the season at hotels, restaurants, shops, rental-car agencies and so on. Television networks also sell advertising against the games. Some of that money will never be spent if November's games are not made up, or if more games are canceled.

Davey said his bar did good business during University of Oregon football games, N.F.L. Sundays and college basketball tournaments and bowl games. Although the Timbers made a splash this year in their first season in Major League Soccer, they did not qualify for the playoffs now under way.

But nothing matches the Blazers. Davey said sales were at least three times higher on days when they were playing compared with ordinary nights, and 80 of the bar's 100 busiest days in the past year were on Blazers game days, at home and on the road. He often hires more staff on those dates to keep up with the crowds; those jobs have gone wanting.

Davey also has a lot riding on the Blazers because he is located close to the arena, which lacks pedestrian traffic when there are no events. His bar is in its second year of business, a critical juncture in the restaurant industry.



From left, Jeremy Duncan, Nadia Benyahich and Robert Edwards at Spirit of '77, a bar that is busiest on Blazers game nights.



The bar's manager said the N.B.A. lockout is "terrible." Mayor Sam Adams of Portland wrote the two sides, urging a settlement.

"Not having the Blazers bums people out," Davey said.

The potential effect on Portland is worrying enough that Mayor Sam Adams joined 13 other mayors with N.B.A. teams in their cities in sending a letter to Commissioner David Stern and Billy Hunter, the executive director of the players union, urging them to settle their differences.

Some of the money generated by the Blazers games would have no effect on the local economy. Players, for instance, spend parts of their salaries out of state. But the income taxes on those salaries are not being collected. Neither are the 6 percent ticket tax and the fees generated by the three arena parking lots, which together generate about \$77,000 a game.

That income, adding up to more than \$3 million over the course of a season, goes into the Spectator Facilities Fund, which pays off the bonds issued to build

and maintain stadiums and arenas in the city. Portland has a reserve fund, but if the entire season is lost, the fund will have to be built up again.

Hundreds of people who work in parking lots and concession stands and as ushers during Blazers games will not see their lost income replaced. Booster groups from local high schools and charities that run concession stands in the arena to raise money will also be left out.

"Just because there isn't much of a macroeconomic effect doesn't mean there aren't a lot of people hurt," said Patrick M. Emerson, who teaches economics at Oregon State.

A variety of companies that do business with the Blazers have also lost income. Paul Zimmerman, the president of Office Products Northwest, has a sponsorship with the team that includes signs at the Rose Garden. In return, the team buys office supplies from his company. Or-

ders from the team were down 18 percent from August to October compared with the same period last year.

"When you're not as active, you use less toner, less paper, fewer pens, so many things that are reduced," said Zimmerman, who employs 37 people.

In a city where water-cooler talk revolves around Brandon Roy's knees, Greg Oden's health or the prospects for the new point guard Raymond Felton, fans are learning to cope. Eric Levine, a high school teacher who shares two season tickets with a friend, has had to explain to his young son why basketball is not on television.

"There's definitely a gap, but we're powerless," he said. "We're a one-horse town without a horse."

David Rubin, whose family has had season tickets since the Blazers' second season in 1971, said he would usually spend opening night with his brother, meeting

him downtown, where they would park their cars and eat dinner before taking the light rail to the arena. Instead, he said, he will be watching reruns on television at home this month.

If there is a silver lining, it is that fans will receive refunds. For many, that money will come in handy.

"I may have a little extra money to throw into my I.R.A.," said Kevin Flink, who has shared season tickets with his sister-in-law for more than 30 years. "In light of the economy, I'm prepared to move on."

Even the longtime fan Diane Snedecor — a minor celebrity because she holds up a sign that says "I Love This Game!" — said she would get over the loss of games.

"Portland needs jobs, so I don't like that part of it," she said of the workers who are affected by the lockout. But, she added, "for me, it's entertainment, so I can take a year off."

HOCKEY

Statistics
Travel,
Atlanta
To Canada

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

If a player for the Winnipeg Jets scores five goals against the Rangers on Sunday night, will he tie the franchise record for goals in a game, set by the Jets of yore Willy Lindstrom in 1982 and Alexei Zhamnov in 1995?

No, he will break it. That record belongs to Ilya Kovalchuk and Pascal Rheaume, who each scored four goals in a game — for the Atlanta Thrashers.

The Winnipeg Jets have a substantial history, in the World Hockey Association from 1972 to 1979 and the N.H.L. from 1979 to 1996, with record-setting players like Teemu Selanne and Dale Hawerchuk. But the Jets' records are actually those of the Thrashers, founded in 1999. The Thrashers moved to Winnipeg over the summer, and the N.H.L. decided that the statistical history of the new Jets was a continuation of Atlanta's.

So where do the records of the old Jets reside? With the Coyotes in Phoenix, where the Jets' previous incarnation moved in 1996.

"The decision is due to the fact that these are franchise records and not city records," said Gary Meagher, an N.H.L. vice president for public relations.

Meagher pointed out that when the Thrashers were founded, they did not inherit the records of the old Atlanta Flames; those moved with the Flames to Calgary.

Winnipeg fans had hoped that the N.H.L. would do something similar to what the N.F.L. did when the Cleveland Browns became the Baltimore Ravens in 1996: mandate that the Browns' name, colors, history and records would remain in Cleveland, and that the Ravens' history would start from scratch.

But there were crucial differences between the Cleveland and Winnipeg situations.

The N.F.L. was faced with so many lawsuits, sponsorship with-

The Thrashers' records go to the new Winnipeg Jets.

drawals and bad publicity that in approving the move, it also agreed to award a new Browns franchise to Cleveland, or move another team there, by 1999. That enabled the team records and history to stay in Cleveland.

When the Jets moved out of Winnipeg, there was no inkling that 15 years later, the city would regain an N.H.L. team.

And so the history of the original Winnipeg Jets moved to the Arizona desert. That is why the uniform numbers of the Winnipeg greats Bobby Hull, Teppo Numminen, Thomas Steen and Hawerchuk are displayed today at the Phoenix Coyotes' rink in the arid scrublands of suburban Glendale. Of those players, only Numminen played in Arizona.

The Coyotes' inherited history has led to some incongruous moments, as when Hawerchuk's No. 10 was retired in 2007 at a ceremony in Glendale.

Hawerchuk, wearing a Winnipeg sweater, made finely parsed remarks that sidestepped the Jets-Coyotes divide — "One of the proudest moments of my life was to wear the emblem of this franchise" — and accepted the polite applause of Phoenix fans, practically none of whom had seen him play. Then he posed for photographs next to a Coyotes jersey with his name and number.

Last summer, the young Atlanta star Evander Kane said he was going to ask Hull for permission to wear No. 9 in Winnipeg, where Hull wore it as the W.H.A.'s biggest star.

"It's almost like asking a father for his daughter's hand in marriage," Kane said at the time.

Hull gave his permission, but as it turned out, Kane was not obliged to ask: Hull's No. 9 was retired in Arizona, not Winnipeg.

"It does seem a little weird, all of this," Steen, a Jet from 1981 to 1995 and now a Winnipeg city councilman, told The Winnipeg Free Press last summer. "We played all our hockey here, after all."

So go the disparate strands of history. The Jets' record for goals in a season by a rookie is not Selanne's famous 76 in 1992-93, but a more pedestrian 29 by Kovalchuk in Atlanta in 2001-2. And when the Jets beat Philadelphia last month, 9-8, they tied the franchise record for goals in a game — though the old Jets scored 12 against the Rangers in a game in February 1985.

BASEBALL

Rebuilding the Cubs, Wrigley Included

By BEN STRAUSS

CHICAGO — In hiring Theo Epstein as their team president, the Chicago Cubs are clearly hoping he can do for them what he did for the Boston Red Sox and break a title drought that defies logic.

But the Cubs' interest in the Boston blueprint goes beyond what Epstein, as general manager, produced on the field for the Red Sox — two championships in nine years after 86 seasons without one. What also intrigues the Cubs is that Epstein's tenure in Boston coincided with an imaginative transformation of Fenway Park from a beloved but frayed baseball landmark into a buffed-up, amenity-laden cash cow.

Wrigley Field is a cherished site, too, three years younger than Fenway, which will be celebrating its 100th birthday in 2012. But Wrigley has yet to get the full Fenway treatment, the soup to nuts to bolts upgrade that it needs. Enter Epstein.

His foremost asset is that he produced immediate results on the field for the Red Sox. But he was also part of a stadium renovation in Boston that mirrors what the Cubs want to do on Chicago's North Side.

After Epstein's introductory news conference in Chicago, the Cubs' chairman, Tom Ricketts, was asked if Epstein's association with Fenway's upgrade made him a more attractive hire.

"The answer is yes," Ricketts said.

The Fenway improvements played a key role in lifting the value of the Red Sox and equipping Epstein with the financial resources to develop and sign top talent.

"I got to see how important it was to renovate the ballpark,"

In Chicago, Epstein is part president, part architect.

Epstein said during the news conference. "It generated revenues at a remarkable clip, and that in turn allowed us on the baseball side to take those revenues and pour them into our baseball operations, which allowed us to get to the level we wanted to be and stay there."

From 2002 to 2011, Fenway's 99th birthday, the Red Sox spent approximately \$285 million on renovations (the state of Massachusetts also chipped in \$55 million for infrastructure improvements to the Fenway neighborhood). The work ranged from the mundane to the upscale. Seats were replaced, concrete repaired and parts of the stadium waterproofed. Seats were ingeniously placed atop the Green Monster in left field, a roof deck with seats was added in right field and the \$300-plus-a-seat EMC Club was redone.

Capacity at Fenway has grown by 3,500 since 2001 and revenues have followed. According to Forbes, from 2002 to 2011, annual revenue for the Red Sox jumped to \$272 million, from \$152 million, and the value of the team rose to \$912 million, from \$426 million.

In recent years, the Cubs have taken smaller steps to upgrade Wrigley, including adding nearly 2,000 bleacher seats for the 2006 season. Revenues are on a steady climb, but Forbes valued the Cubs at \$773 million after the 2010 season, or almost \$150 million less than the Red Sox, and Ricketts would now like to improve the 97-year-old Wrigley in a systematic way that will pay bigger dividends.

"Growing revenues never stops, that's 365," said Crane Kenney, the Cubs' president for business operations.

So far, though, the Cubs have had trouble matching the Red Sox.

Ricketts took over the Cubs in the fall of 2009. A year later, he floated a plan to rebuild Wrigley, asking for about \$200 million in public financing. The proposal died in the state legislature last November.

The Cubs unveiled a revised plan this summer, but it remains to be seen whether the legislature will back it with Illinois facing an \$8 billion budget deficit. The Cubs say the high local amusement tax they pay necessitates state assistance. Kenney was noncommittal about the current status of negotiations with the city and state, saying only



JONATHAN DANIEL/GETTY IMAGES

The Cubs hired Theo Epstein hoping he can rebuild the team and its stadium, as he did with Fenway Park in Boston.

that "the process continues."

The Cubs have also looked for dollars in the surrounding Wrigleyville neighborhood. In 2004, they reached an agreement to collect royalties from the owners of rooftops, where fans watch games from across the street.

More recently, Ricketts proposed closing areas next to Wrigley for a street fair on select weekends, but he had to scale down plans after a backlash from neighborhood residents and businesses. The Red Sox, meanwhile, restrict access to Yawkey Way next to Fenway to ticketed patrons, with all food and memorabilia concessions affiliated with the team.

Because of the historic nature of both stadiums, both teams must work with local municipalities to make any changes. Parts of Wrigley — including the marquee, the scoreboard and the bleachers — were designated as

landmarks by the City Council when the Cubs added more night games to the schedule in 2008. Fenway is not a local landmark, although the Red Sox voluntarily submit all plans to the Boston Landmark Commission for approval.

One place the Cubs have successfully replicated Boston is at their spring training home. The Red Sox coaxed tax dollars out of Florida's Lee County for a new facility, and the Cubs did the same this month in Mesa, Ariz.

For the moment, the Cubs and Red Sox are intersecting almost daily, with both teams looking at some of the same candidates for their open managerial jobs. But even after those jobs are filled, the link will remain as the Cubs, with Epstein's participation, look to improve Wrigley in the same way that the Red Sox, with Epstein, put an enterprising, and enduring, sheen on Fenway.