

Progress Made In Lawsuit Meeting

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TORONTO - Some headway apparently is being made to resolve a lawsuit involving potential buyers of the Lightning.

A meeting was held in New York on Monday with league officials, including NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, representatives from Palace Sports and Entertainment - including CEO Tom Wilson - along with the two sides involved in the lawsuit, Absolute Hockey Enterprises and Oren Koules and their respective attorneys.

Enough headway apparently was made during discussions that the parties have agreed to meet again today in New York.

When reached via text message by the Tribune, one of the principal members of Absolute Hockey, former Columbus general manager Doug MacLean, confirmed that the meeting took place on Monday but did not reveal what kind of progress or resolution was made.

Both NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly and Koules returned e-mails Monday evening declining to comment, while messages left for Tom Scarritt, the lead attorney for Absolute Hockey, were not returned.

A lawsuit was filed in Hillsborough County on Nov. 26 by Absolute Hockey accusing Koules of trying to cut his own deal to purchase the team, and word is the league office was not happy with the developments in a deal that was originally announced during a news conference in Tampa on Aug. 5. The deal was officially terminated by Palace Sports on Nov. 14.

Last week, Bettman offered to act as a mediator in an attempt to settle the differences, which led to Monday's meeting.

It is believed that a Koules buyout of the lawsuit is the most likely scenario being discussed, which could potentially lead the way for Koules, who was to front more than 70 percent of the near \$100 million cash in the original deal, to purchase the team on his own.

If a settlement can't be agreed upon and the lawsuit runs its course, it could take as long as two years before a trial is completed, which would complicate matters for Palace Sports if it still intends to sell the franchise.

ALL GROWN UP: Maybe Pavel Kubina is a little biased in his assessment, but there is no doubt who the Toronto defenseman thinks in the best player in the game - Lightning C Vinny

Lecavalier.

"He pretty much can do everything out there, his confidence is so high," Kubina said Monday.

Kubina, now in his second season with the Leafs after spending his first eight seasons in the league with the Lightning, said Lecavalier's physical and mental maturity since the two broke into the league around the same time is what separates him from the likes of Sidney Crosby, who won the MVP trophy last season.

"He's a little older now and he certainly has grown into one of the top players in the league," Kubina said of his former teammate. "He came in as a 19-year-old and we went through some tough times there early on with some of the teams we played on and it's tough to build up confidence.

"And the thing about Vinny, too, is that he's such a great person. He's a good friend."

NUTS AND BOLTS: C Craig MacDonald was a healthy scratch for the fifth consecutive game. ... Tampa Bay fell to 5-18-2 all-time in Toronto, with just two victories in the past 17 visits.

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