

NBA cancels all games through Nov. 30

Written by BRIAN MAHONEY
Saturday, 29 October 2011 18:06



In this file photo taken Oct. 4, 2011, NBA Commissioner David Stern listens during a news conference following NBA labor talks meeting between basketball players and owners in New York. Stern canceled all November games on Friday, Oct. 28, the 120th day of the lockout. (AP photo/Bebeto Matthews, file)

The Associated Press

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NEW YORK — As NBA players and owners wait to see who will blink first, fans are stuck staring at a blank calendar.

NBA Commissioner David Stern canceled the rest of the November games Friday, saying there will not be a full NBA season "under any circumstances."

The move came about after labor negotiations broke down again when both sides refused to budge on how to split the league's revenues, the same issue that derailed talks last week.

Now, a full month of NBA games have been canceled, and Stern said there's no way of getting them back.

"We held out that joint hope together, but in light of the breakdown of talks, there will not be a full NBA season under any circumstances," he said.

"It's not practical, possible or prudent to have a full season now," added Stern, who previously canceled the first two weeks of the season.

And he repeated his warnings that the proposals might now get even harsher as the league tries to make up the hundreds of millions of dollars that will be lost as the lockout drags on.

"We're going to have to recalculate how bad the damage is," Stern said.

"The next offer will reflect the extraordinary losses that are piling up now."

Just a day earlier, Stern had said he would consider it a failure if the sides didn't reach a deal in

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the next few days and vowed they would take "one heck of a shot" to get it done.

Instead, negotiations broke off again over the division of basketball-related income, just as they did last Thursday.

Union executive director Billy Hunter said the league again insisted it had to be split 50-50, while Stern said Hunter just walked out and left rather than discuss going below 52 percent.

Owners are insistent on a 50-50 split, while players last formally proposed they get 52.5 percent, leaving them about \$100 million apart annually.

Players were guaranteed 57 percent in the previous collective bargaining agreement.

"Derek (Fisher) and I made it clear that we could not take the 50-50 deal to our membership. Not with all the concessions that we granted," Hunter said. "We said we got to have some dollars."

Instead, they'll now be out roughly \$350 million, the losses Hunter previously projected for each month the players were locked out.

He believed a full season could be played if a deal were made this weekend, but Stern emphatically ruled out any hope of that now.

"These are not punitive announcements; these are calendar generated announcements," Stern said.

No further talks have been scheduled.

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There was a sense of optimism entering the day after progress was made on salary cap issues during about 24 hours of talks over the previous two days.

Then the sides brought the revenue split back into the discussion Friday and promptly got stuck on both issues.

Stern said the NBA owners were "willing" to go to 50 percent.

But he said Hunter was unwilling to "go a penny below 52," that he had been getting many calls from agents and then closed up his book and walked out of the room.

Hunter said the league initially moved its target down to 47 percent during Friday's six-hour session, then returned to its previous proposal of 50 percent of revenues.

"We made a lot of concessions, but unfortunately at this time it's not enough, and we're not prepared or unable at this time to move any further," Hunter said.

Union president Fisher said it was difficult to say why talks broke down, or when they would start up again.

"We're here, we've always been here, but today just wasn't the day to try and finish this out," he said.

There was some good news.

Deputy Commissioner Adam Silver said there was essentially a "tentative agreement" on most

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system issues, with Stern rattling off some of them:

Owners agreed to keep the midlevel exception starting at \$5 million a year; and contract lengths would be five years for players staying with their teams and four when leaving for another.

"And then we hit a wall," Stern said.

The small groups that were meeting the previous two days grew a bit Friday.

Union vice presidents Chris Paul — wearing a Yankees cap for his trip to New York — and Theo Ratliff joined the talks, and economist Kevin Murphy returned after he was unavailable Thursday.

Mavericks owner Mark Cuban stayed for the session after taking part Thursday.

Fisher said there were still too many restrictions in the owners' proposal.

Players want to keep a system similar to the old one, and fear owners' ideas would limit player movement and the choices available to them in free agency.

And though they might be inclined to give up one if they received more concessions on the other, players make it sound as if they are the ones doing all the giving back.

The old cap system allowed teams to exceed it through the use of a number of exceptions, many of which the league wants to tweak or even eliminate.

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Hunter has called a hard cap a "blood issue" to players, and though the league has backed off its initial proposal calling for one, players think the changes owners want would work like one.

"We've told them that we don't want a hard cap. We don't want a hard cap any kind of way, either an obvious hard cap or a hard cap that may not be as obvious to most people but we know it works like a hard cap," Hunter said.

"And so you get there, and then all of a sudden they say, 'Well, we also have to have our number.' And you say, 'Well wait a minute, you're not negotiating in good faith.'"

But if players think what's being proposed is a hard cap, here's another warning: Silver won't rule out the league seeking one again.

"Our response is then let's have a hard cap, which is what we wanted," he said.

"We don't think it's a hard cap...We've all been wasting our time if they believe this is a hard cap. We've been spending literally hundreds of hours negotiating the specifics of a system, where they're now saying is the equivalent of a hard cap. We've been clear from the beginning from a league standpoint we would prefer a hard cap."

When players offered to reduce their guarantee from 57 percent to 53 percent, Hunter said that would have transferred about \$1.1 billion to owners over six years.

Now, at 52.5, he said that would grow to more than \$1.5 billion.

But even a 50-50 split would be too high for some hardline owners, because it would reduce only \$280 million of the \$300 million they said they lost last season.

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Owners initially proposed a BRI split that players said would have had them around 40 percent.

Though they will miss a paycheck on Nov. 15, Hunter said each player would have received a minimum of \$100,000 from the escrow money that was returned to them to make up the difference after salaries fell short of the guaranteed 57 percent of revenues last season.

The real losses, though, could be felt by arena staff and other people who work in fields connected to the game.

Stern apologized to them in making the announcement.

But Jeff Lee, a 37-year-old cafe owner and Warriors season-ticketholder in the East Bay, said he isn't discouraged about Friday's setback.

"I'm pretty certain that the season's going to start sooner or later," Lee said.

"I know when the season starts it's going to be well worth the wait."

AP Sports Writer Janie McCauley in Oakland, Calif., contributed to this report.