

# Epstein to return as general manager

By JIMMY GOLEN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## BOSTON

Theo Epstein's new job is the same as his old one: general manager of the Boston Red Sox.

The Red Sox announced Tuesday that Epstein would resume his old duties, nothing more and nothing less than when he left on Halloween.

"While Theo was contemplating returning to the organization in an advisory role," Red Sox president Larry Lucchino said in a statement, "he and I talked and agreed it was best for the organization if he returned as general manager, a title more appropriate for him because it accurately reflects the role he will play."

Once the youngest general manager in baseball history and still the only one to win a World Series in Boston, Epstein walked away from his dream job on Halloween after a never-explained internal squabble convinced him he could no longer put his heart into the job.

But even after leaving, fleeing Fenway in a gorilla suit to avoid the encamped media, Epstein remained in touch with his former colleagues.

After a halfhearted search to replace him, the Red Sox announced Dec. 12 that Jed Hoyer and Ben Cherington, two of Epstein's former lieutenants, would serve as co-GMs. Last week, the team said Epstein would return to baseball operations full-time, in a capacity to be determined.

Epstein's return as GM — his other title is being moved up a notch from senior vice president to executive vice president — was first reported by the Boston Herald on its Web site. Neither last week's statement nor the one released Tuesday specified what led to the friction, though Lucchino alluded to an improved relationship between the business and baseball sides of the organization.

"Walls have crumbled, perceptions of one another have changed, and appreciation of one another has grown," Lucchino said. "As an enhanced sense of 'team' has emerged, we have rediscovered that, whatever our differences may have been, baseball is at the center of our operations and our lives, and working toward the success of the Red Sox is a commitment which all of us share."

Hoyer's new job will be assistant general manager, and Cherington was given the title of vice president of player personnel. Bill Lajoie stays on as a special adviser for baseball operations, and Craig Shipley was named vice president for international scouting and special assistant to the general manager.

Hoyer and Cherington acknowledged that they knew when they took the GM job that Epstein was expected to return. They were told then what their roles would be, Red Sox owner John Henry said.

# USOC: Nardiello will not coach at Winter Games

The Associated Press

The U.S. Olympic Committee will not allow Tim Nardiello to coach the American skeleton team at next month's Turin Games, despite his reinstatement by the sport's national governing body after an arbitrator found no evidence to support claims he sexually harassed two team members.

The USOC said its investigation found that Nardiello failed to exercise appropriate judgment with his athletes, violated ethical codes and the USOC Code of Conduct. It also said the U.S. Bobsled and Skeleton Federation initially planned to fire Nardiello after the Olympics, citing that as another factor.

"It is our belief there has been a pattern of conduct ... that simply does not meet the standard of what is acceptable ...," said Jim Scherr, the USOC's chief executive officer.

Nardiello said that he wasn't sure what he'd do next and he was baffled by the USOC's move.

Nardiello was suspended by the USBSF on Dec. 31 over allegations he sexually harassed two national team members. When an arbitrator announced Monday he found those claims without merit, the USBSF allowed Nardiello's return.

But the USOC, which has final say over the Olympic delegation, still denied Nardiello a credential.



David Duval tees off from the first hole during the first round of the Sony Open in Honolulu on Jan. 12.

# Driven to play

## Duval making progress despite setbacks

By DOUG FERGUSON  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

David Toms was curious, like so many others who get paired with David Duval. They had not played together since the 2002 U.S. Open at Bethpage, where Duval was the reigning British Open champion. Duval shot 78 that day, the start of a spiral into one of the most mystifying slumps in golf.

Toms didn't know what went wrong. He only saw the scores.

Duval's five-year exemption on the PGA Tour from his British Open victory expires this season, something he was more aware of last year when he hit rock bottom. He shot more rounds in the 80s than the 60s, and the only cut he made in 20 starts on tour was a tie for 60th in the Texas Open.

It is important that he plays well this year, and his start to the season did not bode well. Fidgeting over his opening tee shot at the Sony Open, trying to find a posture that didn't cause his back to lock up, Duval hit a nasty hook that one-hopped off the driving range net and settled at the base of a palm tree.

Double bogey. On the second hole, another wild hook and bounce, landing the ball in the third fairway. Next tee.

"I didn't know what to expect," Toms said. "He said he had been swinging well at home, and then he hurt his back when he got here."

"And on Friday, other than a couple of drives, he was in control of everything."

No doubt, Duval is making progress.

He shot 68 to make the cut on the number at the Sony Open, which he later described as a baby step.

More proof came last week at the Bob Hope Classic.

Blown away by howling wind on a new golf course in the desert, he tumbled to a 78 in the second round. But he kept plugging along and shot 64 with an insurance birdie on the final hole to make the cut.

"Are there little steps or small victories involved? Sure, I guess," Duval said. "Buy my goal isn't to make cuts. I know I'm playing well enough to win tournaments. It's a matter of staying with it."

Duval has had ample incentive to quit.

Injuries have been such a part of his career — both shoulders, right wrist, the lower back — that he is tired of talking about it. He is financially set and has never been happier. He dotes on his wife's three children, and he and Susie now travel with Brayden, a miracle son born to them in April.

He is driven to play well, even if he has a hard time explaining that to his skeptics.

His goals might not be the same as those watching him, or even those against whom he competes. There is no greater thrill in golf than holding a trophy, something he hasn't done since Japan at the end of 2001.

But that hardly constitutes fulfillment.

"I know I was the best player in the world," he said. "I still feel like, if I'm healthy, I can be one of the better players, whether that's top five, 10, 20, whatever."

# Lemieux retires for second time

## Hockey star battling health issues

By ALAN ROBINSON  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## PITTSBURGH

Penguins star and owner Mario Lemieux, one of hockey's greatest players, retired Tuesday for the second time.

Lemieux, a Hall of Famer who won Stanley Cups and scoring titles and then battled through cancer and heart problems in a comeback, announced his decision at a news conference.

"If I could still play this game I would be on the ice," Lemieux said.

The 40-year-old Lemieux learned in early December he has atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that can cause his pulse to flutter wildly and must be controlled by medication.

Lemieux, the NHL's seventh-leading career scorer with 1,723 points, tried to return a week after being hospitalized with the problem, but it flared up again during a Dec. 16 game against Buffalo, and he has not played since.

"This is always a difficult decision for any athlete to make," he said.

Lemieux has been practicing the past several weeks with the intent on returning this season but, with the Penguins stuck in a 10-game losing streak and with no hope of them making the playoffs, decided to quit playing for a second time.

He also retired after the 1996-97 season following years of back problems and a 1993 cancer scare in which he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, but he returned midway through the 2000-01 season and has played since.

However, he has again fought through injuries, including two major hip problems that caused him to miss most of the 2001-02 and 2003-04 seasons. He had seven goals and 15 assists in 26 games this season.

"I have two main reasons for retiring here today," Lemieux said. "The first one is I can no longer play at the level that I was accustomed to in the past, and that has been, very, very frustrating to me throughout this past year."

"The second one is realizing that my health, along with my family, is the most important thing in the world."

"I also realized that the new



Pittsburgh Penguins hockey great Mario Lemieux pauses during an emotional moment at a news conference in Pittsburgh where he announced his retirement Tuesday.

NHL is really for the young guys, and I think we have a lot of them now in the league. Some young guys that are dominating — we have a few here in Pittsburgh — and I think these young guys are really the future of the NHL."

Lemieux, a first-ballot Hall of Fame inductee in 1997, led the Penguins, the NHL's worst team before he was drafted in 1984, to successive Stanley Cup championships in 1991 and 1992. He won six NHL scoring titles, three MVP awards and two Conn Smythe awards as the Stanley Cup playoffs MVP.

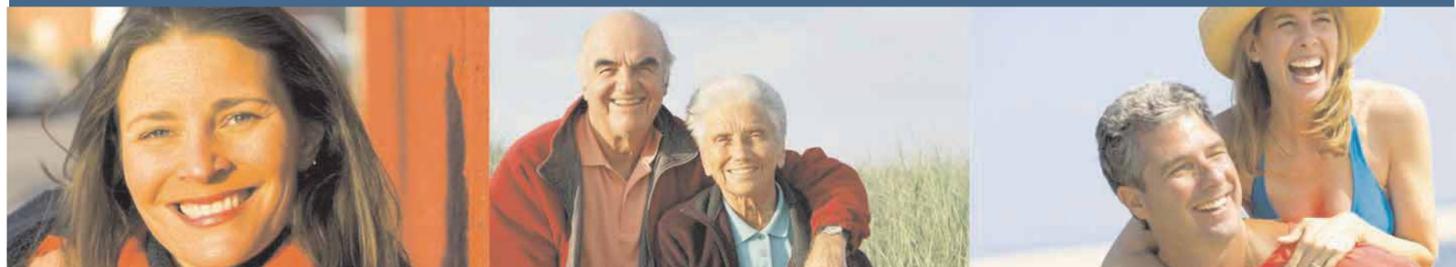
Lemieux, who wore No. 66 throughout his career, scored 690 goals and had 1,033 assists in 915 career games. He also became the first major pro sports star to buy the team for which he played, assembling a group that bought the team in federal bankruptcy court in 1999.

Lemieux's group has owned the team since but announced last week it is selling, a possible prelude to the team leaving Pittsburgh in June 2007.

After his stunning return in December 2000, which surprised even his close friends, Lemieux helped the Penguins to the Eastern Conference final that season but the team has not made the playoffs since.

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