

FOOTBALL

Tagliabue not expecting progress with union

NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue's pessimism about labor negotiations with the players' union permeated his annual state of the league address Friday.

"We're not making the kind of progress we need to be making," he said. "I don't think negotiations are going very well."

Gene Upshaw, executive director of the NFL Players Association, said the same thing the previous day. Upshaw warned that without significant movement by March 9, the union will consider its legal options.

The collective bargaining agreement expires after the 2007 season. But under the current contract, there would be no salary cap in 2007. Upshaw insists if the cap disappears then, it won't come back.

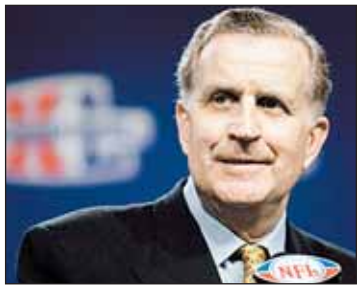
Tagliabue wasn't optimistic about making much progress in negotiations before the league's meetings begin March 25 in Orlando, Fla.

"A lot of things get done at the 11th hour and 59th minute," Tagliabue said. "I don't know if we'll get something done by the league meetings."

These talks have become more contentious in great part because team owners can't agree among themselves how to divide revenues that will go to the players.

High-revenue teams who make more money from sources other than television and ticket sales are balking at contributing the same percentage of their income as low-revenue franchises.

Patriots owners Robert Kraft,



NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue delivers his state of the NFL remarks in Detroit on Friday.

one of the league's power brokers, believes a CBA extension must preclude any agreement among the owners on how to split money.

Smith says Irvin should be inducted into hall

Emmitt Smith said he believes Hall of Fame voters are holding Michael Irvin's personal problems against him.

Smith, the NFL's career rushing leader and eligible for the hall in four more years, campaigned vigorously Friday for his former Dallas Cowboys teammate.

Irvin is on the ballot for the second time, and election results will be announced today. Smith senses the wide receiver didn't get in last year because of Irvin's off-field trouble.

"But you're going to try to bring this personal side of it?" Smith said. "This is what he's done off the field. What has that got to do with what he's done on the football field?"

Irvin set a record with 11 100-yard receiving games in 1995, when he was part of a third Super Bowl champion.

Rivalry not as fierce as before

Brawl thing of past as Pistons take on Pacers

By Cliff Brunt
The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS

Indiana vs. Detroit.
The mere mention of those teams brings visions of flying beer, haymakers and of course, Ron Artest.

But now that the league's No. 1 bad boy is out West with the Sacramento Kings, some of the focus will return to basketball as the teams play each other for the first time this season today at Conseco Fieldhouse.

Two seasons ago, the Pistons knocked off the top-seeded Pacers in the Eastern Conference finals on their way to winning the NBA title. Last season, the Pistons beat the Pacers in the second round of the playoffs to send Reggie Miller into retirement.

The two franchises have been among the league's best the past eight seasons. In that span, the teams have combined for a championship, three trips to the NBA Finals and seven Eastern Conference finals appearances.

Detroit (38-6) enters the game



The Pacers' Fred Jones, right, looks to pass against the Lakers' Brian Cook during the fourth quarter of Wednesday's game at Conseco Fieldhouse.

with the league's best record, but the Pacers have stumbled to a 22-22 mark as Artest was benched for weeks before he was traded and Jermaine O'Neal is now sidelined with a groin tear.

The teams will always be linked by the Nov. 19, 2004, brawl as an altercation between Detroit's Ben Wallace and Artest eventually led to Artest going into the stands after a fan and later being suspended for the rest of the season.

Wallace said Artest's absence drops the rivalry a notch. "That was two teams at the top

of their game competing for the top spot in the East and that's no longer the case," he said. "That's going to change the game itself."

"Regardless of who's playing with whom, when two of the top teams come together in this league for the top spots, it's always going to be an exciting battle. Once you lose that, you lose some of the edge. The game loses some of the steam."

The Pacers are looking for a win to regain some of the respect they've lost in an up-and-down season.



TONIGHT'S GAME

Detroit Pistons (38-6) at Indiana Pacers (22-22)

Time: 8 p.m.
TV: Fox Sports Midwest
Radio: WIBC-1070 AM

O'Neal wishes he didn't have to miss a matchup with the league's top team.

"It's tough to watch any game you can't be a part of," he said. "They're the best team in the NBA right now, and to not be able to play against them is tough."

Indiana center Jeff Foster said the Pacers don't think about the brawl much anymore. They're much more concerned with facing the best and deepest front line in the league.

"We have to play hard and hope some of their guys are missing shots, and try to keep Ben and Rasheed (Wallace) and Antonio (McDyess) off the glass," Foster said. "Hopefully we're game for it."

The Pacers have gotten a boost from the arrival of Peja Stojakovic in the Artest trade. Stojakovic had 26 points in the Pacers' 105-79 win against the Lakers on Wednesday.

SKIING

CHAMONIX, France

Miller speaks out after return to World Cup

Bode Miller's first day back on the slopes ended with a third-place finish in a World Cup race Thursday, and then skiing's bad boy denied ever suggesting that Lance Armstrong took performance-enhancing drugs.

Miller, who took a week off the World Cup circuit and played golf in Dubai, has been criticized for comments he made last month in Rolling Stone magazine about Armstrong, the seven-time Tour de France winner, and baseball slugger Barry Bonds.

"In no way was I trying to incriminate him (Armstrong) or accuse him in any way of cheating," Miller said after finishing third behind Austrians Benjamin Raich and Rainer Schoenfelder in a super-combi. "The interview was pretty warped and pretty compressed to make it sound that way."

Rolling Stone spokeswoman Nora Haynes said Friday that the magazine stands by its reporting. Miller said he hasn't spoken to



Bode Miller speeds down the hill on his way to third place in an alpine ski men's World Cup Super-Combi race in Chamonix, France, on Friday.

Armstrong since but would apologize if he saw him.

On the slopes, the 28-year-old ski whiz was clearly back in form with his third podium finish in the combined this season.

"I think my head is consistently pretty much in the same place, but it was nice to take a break and play golf," Miller said.

Raich rallied from 17th to win in a combined time of 2 minutes, 36.48 seconds for a downhill run followed by a slalom run, extending his lead atop the overall standings. Miller finished in 2:37.47 for his third top-three result.

BASKETBALL

Fever sign free agents, trade another player

The Indiana Fever signed free agents Olympia Scott and Charlotte Smith on Friday and traded guard Kelly Miller to Phoenix for Anna DeForge.

Scott was Indiana's starting center in 2001 and 2002 and is currently playing in Turkey, where she is averaging 16.4 points and 11.6 rebounds a game.

Smith, a seven-year WNBA player, was with Washington last season and is in her fourth year as an assistant college coach for the No. 1-ranked North Carolina women's team.

"We have significantly upgraded our team," Fever general manager Kelly Krauskopf said. "We knew that we needed to replace some people in the post when Natalie Williams announced her retirement. We feel that we've got good stability and athleticism at the post now, and we've gotten bigger on our perimeter."

The 6-foot-2 Scott played in 18 games with the WNBA champion Sacramento Monarchs last year.

She averaged 9.1 points in 61 games for the Fever before a knee injury forced her to miss the 2003 season. She signed with Charlotte before the 2004 season.

GOLF

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates

Woods shoots 66, in tie for second place in Dubai

Two shots into the water cost Tiger Woods the lead at the Dubai Desert Classic.

Danish journeyman Anders Hansen made nine birdies for a 9-under 63, and Retief Goosen celebrated his 39th birthday with a 5-under 67 to share the second-round lead at 13-under 131.

Woods hit two balls into water, one for a bogey and another for a double bogey but still managed a 66 to tie for third with Nick Dougherty (66) and first-round co-leader Richard Green (69). They trail the leaders by two shots at 11-under.

Woods seemed headed for a score in the low 60s; he opened with an eagle and was 6-under after eight holes.

"Frustrating," Woods said. "You know me, I hate dropping shots. Especially when you have a good round going like that."

Defending champion Ernie Els was three shots off the leaders with a 66. He made his 70th straight cut on the European tour, breaking Bernhard Langer's record of 69.

Six players failed to complete the round because of darkness, and will finish early today before the third round.

By Michael Marot
The Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON

The Indiana Hoosiers think they learned how to beat a No. 1 team when they stayed with Duke.

Today, the 22nd-ranked Hoosiers want to show the nation they can make their blueprint work.

"I think the Duke game really helped us for this one," guard Roderick Wilmont said. "We're more calm, and I think we're going to go out there and play our game."

Today's game against top-ranked Connecticut (19-1) gives Indiana a chance to improve on its 75-67 loss to then-No. 1 Duke on Nov. 30.

The problem against Duke was a sluggish start. Indiana outplayed

the Blue Devils for the final 35 minutes, but Duke's early 16-2 lead was too much to overcome.

Some players, like Wilmont, attributed those early troubles to jitters even amid the friendly environs of Assembly Hall.

The lesson: Play hard, have fun and stay poised.

Since then, the Hoosiers have demonstrated composure in big games. They routed then-No. 15 Kentucky 79-53 in Indianapolis, hung on against then-No. 18 Ohio State and held off then-No. 7 Illinois amid feverish home-court atmospheres that rivaled the one for Duke.

Now they expect to reap the rewards against UConn.

"I'd never been in an environment like that before," backup guard Errek Suhr said about the

Colts' Manning honored for working to help others

By Joe Kay
The Associated Press

DETROIT
Peyton Manning got to spend a day with Walter Payton when he was only 4 years old.



MANNING

The Chicago Bears' famed running back took him into the surf in Hawaii in 1980, when Peyton Manning's father, Archie, was on the island for his first Pro Bowl. At first, the Mannings weren't sure who was watching the kid.

When they learned it was Payton, they stopped fretting.

"Walter had me out the whole time on a catamaran," Manning said. "I felt safe, and my parents obviously were relieved because they knew Walter was taking great care of me."

Now, Manning is adding to that

legacy of caring for others.

The Indianapolis Colts quarterback received the NFL's Walter Payton Man of the Year award on Friday, recognizing his work with children and Hurricane Katrina victims.

Payton died of cancer in 1999, and his widow, Connie, presented Manning with the Gladiator statue signifying the annual award.

"I challenge each and every player in the National Football League to consider the impact they have just because they play the game of football, then go do something about it," Manning said. "There's more to the game."

Manning set up the PeyBack Foundation to help communities around Indianapolis and has worked with a national nonprofit group that helps abused and neglected children.

After Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, he and brother Eli, the Giants quarterback, flew to Louisiana and delivered 30,000 pounds of relief supplies.

Daniel S. Martin
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