

Bills camp at Fisher officially in danger

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In the Feb. 9 issue of the Courier, the warning was in the headline: "League stoppage may sack Bills camp."

On the midnight that divided March 11 and March 12, that stoppage came a step closer to happening, as the team owners of the NFL locked out the NFL's players.

A few hours earlier, the NFL Players Association had voted to decertify, dissolving the union as a legal entity and allowing the players file a class action lawsuit against the owners.

The lawsuit filed, known as Brady et al vs. National Football League et al, is an attempt to have the lockout end.

While the lockout is in place, all player-related activities- with the exception of the draft- can no longer take place.

This stoppage includes free agency, trades and training camps.

Should the lockout continue into the summer, it is possible that the Bills' camp at Fisher would be delayed or shortened, if not outright canceled.

Professor Todd Harrison, the Co-Director of Camp Operations with the Bills, says that things have definitely become more of a concern now that the lockout is in place.

"We've been in conversations with the Bills, and it is certainly a worry."

Harrison continued, "The time frame that we need, that us and the Bills need, to have a decision made by is far before the July 15 date that they would start coming in to camp and start moving things in."

When the lockout will end will likely depend on what happens in the courts. The first hearing of the union's case will take place on April 6.

Maury Brown, the founder and president of the Business of Sports Network and a respected sports business analyst who has been sourced in several national publications, thinks that the question of how long the lockout will be is tied to what will happen during these hearings.

"If the judge rules for the players," wrote Brown in a E-mail correspondence, "the lockout would

be lifted."

"If not," he continued, "it could be the beginning of the season, maybe longer, before the lockout is over. "

The fact that it has gone to the courts worries Harrison, who said, "-now [that] we are in the court systems- with all the different injunctions... it could take some time."

Still, Harrison repeatedly stated during an interview, Fisher has to be ready.

"We meet with some of the Bills guys here in the next 10 days or so to look at some things, but we need to keep preparing as if there is training camp."

"There have been conversations on both sides, [but] we don't have any specific date set by us or by Buffalo as of yet [where Camp wouldn't happen]. That date may arise at some point, but not as of yet."

While the Bills' front office has yet to make any comments on the possibility of the lockout canceling or delaying camp, a March 14 statement to Bills fans from CEO Russ Brandon expressed general optimism for 2011.

Brandon, himself a Fisher alumnus, wrote that, "We remain hopeful that a new and fair agreement can be reached in time to avoid any significant disruption to our preparations for the 2011 season."

It is probably safe to say that those at Fisher who deal with training camp would share his hopes.

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