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League stoppage may sack Bills camp

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Megan Hurley

League stoppage may sack Bills camp

Empty helmets sit on the practice field at last summer's camp.

Posted: Wednesday, February 9, 2011 12:00 am

Dan Glickman
Assistant Sports Editor | 0 comments

Since 2000, the Buffalo Bills have prepared for the grind of the NFL season at St. John Fisher College.

Whether their 11th trip to Fisher occurs is now in doubt as the NFL and its Players Association seem to be headed towards a work stoppage.

The outlook, according to one knowledgeable observer, doesn't look good.

"My impression of matters right now between the players and owners does not look promising for St. John Fisher," wrote Maury Brown in an e-mail correspondence, "as the chances are fairly high that there will be a lockout, and with it, the possibility of it impacting training camps is very real."

Brown, a sports business analyst who is the founder and president of the ring of sports business websites known as the Business of Sports Network, added that the

chances of a work stoppage affecting training camp will be tied to whether or not the players and owners can reach a new agreement by March 3.

It is on March 3 that the current collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between the NFL and NFLPA expires at 11:59 p.m. sharp.

Should a new agreement not be in place by that time, it is expected that the owners of the 32 NFL teams will lock the players out.

During a lockout, or any similar work stoppage, no player activities can take place. This includes training camps, and this fact is something that St. John Fisher professor Todd Harrison, the Co-Director of Camp Operations for Bills camp, knows too well.

"We're at the mercy of the NFL and the Players Association," said Harrison.

"If they don't have a collective bargaining agreement, then there won't be camp, there won't be practices and there won't be games until they reach that agreement."

St. John Fisher would lose much from a cancellation of Bills camp, Harrison said, but in general it would not be monetary, but rather more intangible.

"There wouldn't be a number of people on campus during the summer. There wouldn't be the three or four weeks of

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publicity," said Harrison.

"For a time, it's just the college that makes the news, It's free publicity," Harrison continued, "It would be thousands of dollars if we were to try to pull that time onto television and commercials."

Even outside of Fisher, the publicity that training camp brings is a widely-felt advantage.

"The fact that any news about camp that goes out in the papers goes out under the Pittsford byline," said Pittsford town supervisor William Carpenter. "This lets the name of Pittsford, NY get known throughout this country."

But the effect of a camp cancellation goes beyond merely lost publicity.

Without any camp, some less needed staff may be let go.

Harrison mentioned ushers and security, amongst other groups, as potential areas where the usual camp jobs would not exist in its absence.

Also at risk would be the workers at Lackmann Culinary Services, who do catering and other food services at Bills training camp.

"If there's not a training camp, there's no need for any food and there's not a need for a full staff," said Harrison, who noted that he doesn't work for Lackmann.

According to Lackmann director Andrea Maccarone, Lackmann currently has two plans in place.

One plan is where there is a full camp but with the possibility of a cancellation, and another where a smaller, "mini" training camp takes place.

At least 80 "team members" are usually employed by Lackmann during a usual training camp.

In addition to staff, current Fisher students could also be affected by a lockout.

"At any given training camp, we have eight to ten sport management students that work with the Bills or Training Camp over a six-week period. It [a lockout] would have a impact on them, and on other students," said Harrison.

Despite these potential consequences of a lockout, Fisher's training camp staff is currently being optimistic.

"We are going under the premise that training camp will happen," said Harrison, who explained that the college must be prepared in case a deal is reached at the last minute.

"They could reach a agreement on July 25 and the way the schedule turns out maybe they'd show up on July 28, so we have to be ready."

Until then, Harrison says, "We're in constant discussion with the people in Buffalo on the contacts we have there. We are in constant communication with them and they have been giving us a little heads-up on anything they are hearing. So the communication is really strong. We've been doing this for 11 years now."

So as time goes on and the March 3 deadline approaches, all that Harrison and others can do is watch and listen as the NFL labor situation runs it's course.

One thing is for sure: if Bills camp is canceled, many will be disappointed.

"We'd be very disappointed," said Carpenter, "It has become a fabric of our summers and I think its something our residents look forward to every year."

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Posted in Sports on *Wednesday, February 9, 2011 12:00 am.*

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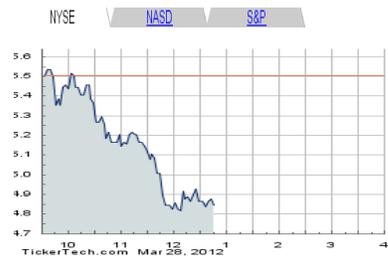
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