

By the book

Playoffs no excuse for NHL to ignore rules

No Goal." These were the words of Buffalo Sabres coach Andy Ruff to a crowd of thousands of fans last week — fans who were blatantly gypped by the National Hockey League out of a chance to see the Sabres win the Stanley Cup.



MARK PASSWATERS

There are no two ways about it; Brett Hull of the Dallas Stars had his foot in the crease of the goal when he scored the overtime goal to win Game 6 and the Stanley Cup for his team. As a result, it should not have counted.

There was an instant-replay system put in place by the NHL to prevent just such an occurrence, and it was not used. When Jeff Bettman, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and asked why the replay was not consulted, Bettman walked away from him.

Perhaps in an attempt to shield themselves from catcalls of incompetence, the NHL is claiming Hull never lost possession of the puck and by continuation the goal was good.

Continuation? What is that? It is not in the rules. What is in the rules? If a player has his foot in the goalie's crease, then no goal should count. Period.

If continuation is going to be the law of the land, then Buffalo fans should not be the only ones up in arms. The Boston Bruins had a goal very similar to Hull's disallowed in last year's playoffs, facing elimination by the Washington Capitals. The Capitals won and went on to the Stanley Cup Finals — where a goal by Peter Bondra was disallowed because his foot was in the crease which would have been the winning goal in Game 2.

Continuation sounds like something that happened when Michael Jordan would get "fouled" at the three-point line, drive to the hoop and get a foul shot to go with his basket. It does not sound like something that should exist in hockey.

The Stars are not unworthy champions. Dallas was the better team and probably would have won

anyway. But the NHL's decision hurt the Stars just as badly as it did Buffalo, since they will have to hear they had the Cup given to them because of the NHL's stupidity.

The NHL had its off-season meetings last week and abolished instant replay. However, it was still part of the rules during the Finals and should have been used. Rules are rules. They should not be changed at any time, be it the NHL Finals, pee-wee hockey or "just because."

This is something the NHL does not get and is part of the reason hockey will never be on par with baseball, basketball and football in this country. The NBA does not get rid of the 24-second shot clock in the NBA Finals (though the New York

Knicks certainly tried during Game 5), nor does the NFL stop calling holding during the playoffs. Rules are in place for a reason — to bring some semblance of order to the game.

If they are ignored, the game is a sham. If they are ignored by the league itself, the league has no credibility.

A great deal of this blame must be placed on Bettman, who still thinks a hockey puck opens up like a can of Skoal. Many people in America regard the NHL as a dull, low-scoring league with brawls between Canadians interspersed with things which do not make sense. If people do not understand the game because of icing or off-sides rules, wouldn't they be even more confused by the NHL ignoring the rules altogether? The one thing that is clear is this episode will harm the NHL's credibility.

Now replay is gone, so Hull's goal will be just fine next year. Not that it really matters, since the damage done by ignoring the rules on the books and making up new ones will already be there. The only way this will change is if Gary Bettman goes the same way as replay — out the window.

Mark Passwaters is a graduate student in electrical engineering.



Draft-day decisions

Teams looking for surprise star among NBA hopefuls

WASHINGTON (AP) — This NBA draft is not about Elton Brand's true height, Steve Francis' vertical leap, Wally Szczerbiak's jumper or Lamar Odom's whereabouts.

It is about Jerry Krause's secret plan to rebuild his dynasty.

As the clock ticked toward the moment Wednesday night when commissioner David Stern will walk to the podium and announce the No. 1 pick, the general manager of the Chicago Bulls had everyone on edge.

"It's nerve wracking," Francis said yesterday. "It's the last day, and you hear so many rumors and so much that's going on."

Francis and Brand have emerged as the consensus choices for the No. 1 pick. Szczerbiak, Odom and UCLA guard Baron Davis are widely considered to be top-five choices.

But the order of selection — the first five being Chicago, Vancouver, Charlotte, the Los Angeles Clippers and Toronto — figured to change by time the draft begins.

"It's a mystery to me, just like every other player is really wondering here they're going," Francis said.

Krause has been talking to numerous teams to explore dozens of trade options, and most people around the league expected him to deal the No. 1 pick.

"He holds the key," NBA scouting director Marty Blake said. "But he's not going to give any hints as to what he's going to do."

For weeks, the widespread belief was that the secretive Krause had his eyes on Szczerbiak, the smooth shooting forward from Miami of Ohio. The one rumor which has refused to die had Krause trading the No. 1 pick to

Rockets reject deal for Olajuwon

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Rockets listened to their hearts yesterday — and possibly avoided a major public relations blunder — when they refused a trade offer from the Toronto Raptors for Hakeem Olajuwon, one of the city's most recognizable athletes.

Loyalty to the 12-time NBA All-Star was a factor in the Rockets declining Toronto's offers.

"I believe in those things," coach Rudy Tomjanovich said. "It would be very hard for me to be the guy who

pulls the trigger on something like that. We've been through a lot together. I'd hope that a situation like that doesn't come along."

The deal reportedly would have involved Kevin Willis, who played two seasons with the Rockets before he was traded to Toronto last June.

The reports said Houston also would have gotten Doug Christie, 29, who played 3 and 1/2 seasons for the Los Angeles Lakers and New York Knicks before spending the last three seasons in Toronto.

Toronto, with the Raptors giving up the fifth pick and guard Tracy McGrady.

"There's a very good possibility that we will not make any decision on the draft choice until Wednesday afternoon," said Krause, who is trying to rebuild the Bulls following the breakup of the team that won three straight titles from 1996-98. "We don't feel there's an advantage to us to making it sooner."

Many of the players expecting to be early picks had more of an air of uncertainty about them than usual on the day before the draft.

Some of the comments were downright odd — Brand sounding eager to play for Vancouver, Szczerbiak saying he would "love" to play for the Clippers.

Brand, who left Duke after his sophomore season, is a 6-foot-8 forward who played center in college and averaged 17.7 points and 9.8 rebounds.

Francis, a 6-3 guard, averaged 17.0 points for Maryland and skipped his senior season.

SEE DRAFT ON PAGE 4.

NBA DRAFT ORDER

1. Chicago Bulls
2. Vancouver Grizzlies
3. Charlotte Hornets
4. Los Angeles Clippers
5. Toronto Raptors
6. Minnesota Timberwolves
7. Washington Wizards
8. Cleveland Cavaliers
9. Phoenix Suns
10. Golden State Warriors
11. Cleveland Cavaliers
12. Toronto Raptors
13. Seattle SuperSonics
14. Minnesota Timberwolves
15. New York Knicks
16. Chicago Bulls
17. Atlanta Hawks
18. Denver Nuggets
19. Utah Jazz
20. Atlanta Hawks
21. Atlanta Hawks
22. Houston Rockets
23. Los Angeles Lakers
24. Utah Jazz
25. Miami Heat
26. Indiana Pacers
27. Atlanta Hawks
28. Utah Jazz
29. San Antonio Spurs

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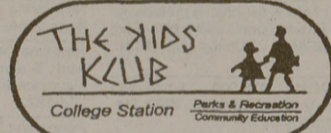
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