



Forgotten side of the WHL trade deadline

by Greg Harder, Regina Leader Post

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It has been a tough week for the Regina Pats - and it's not over yet.

With their fate twisting in the wind, the players are counting the days, hours, minutes and seconds leading up to Saturday's 1 p.m. trade deadline, eager for the whole ordeal to be over.

It can't happen soon enough.

"It's a crappy week," admitted Pats goalie Daniel Wapple, who was traded to Regina at last year's deadline. "It causes a lot of stress on guys. As soon as that day comes it'll be a load off the shoulders, especially with all the moves we've been making. It'll be nice when it's over."

In this case, one person's pain can be another's pleasure.

For many outside observers - and even a few on the inside - the days leading up to the deadline represent one of the most thrilling times of the season. The whole thing takes on a life of its own as rumours swirl about what players may be available and which teams might sell the farm to get them.

It's a time when armchair GMs speculate on potential moves and even devise trades of their own. It's mostly harmless fun, except when Twitter and other online forums become a means for passing off guesswork or false information as fact - with no regard for the human side of the equation.

The media has helped create that monster with an epidemic of wannabe "insiders" who are desperate for their piece of the action. In reality, there's a fine line between satisfying the public's craving for information and recklessly throwing names against the wall in hopes that some might stick - all to take credit for a "scoop" that will be forgotten in a day.

In some ways, the trade deadline represents fantasy hockey at its worst. It's easy to get caught up in the frenzy (present company included) and almost as difficult to walk that fine line.

When the former occurs, it's worth a friendly reminder that the names being thrown around at others' amusement are not trading cards, they're kids.

Yes, it's true that trades are "part of the business" and the select few players who overcome long odds to reach the NHL are almost certain to be traded at some point in their careers.

It's also true that those are pro players - adults who in many cases are being paid millions of dollars.

They can afford a little inconvenience.

The same can't be said for Dryden Hunt, Kyle Burroughs and Connor Gay, the three players who said tearful goodbyes to the Pats on Monday, all looking like someone had just ripped out their guts or run over their dogs.

Of course, they'll eventually suck it up and accept their fate because it's part of the life they chose - and a requisite for the continuation of a dream.

"It's a different career choice that we picked but it's part of the business," noted Burroughs. "I'm not saying it's a perk ... but it's hockey."

As much as hockey is a great game, it's also a cruel and unfeeling business.

Fortunately, it hasn't changed kids like Burroughs, who became nostalgic as he reminisced about his four years in Regina and how he adopted the city as his second home - and vice versa.

That home also included a family.

"It's something I've never experienced before, just to have that friendship, that family bond and then all of a sudden one day it's (taken away)," said Pats defenceman Colby Williams. "It's not lost but it'll be different since you can't see them every day. The guys that are leaving, you've grown so close to them over four or five years together. It is a family. You're almost together more than you are with your own family. It's tough to see them go."

Williams and his teammates shared a bond that few can understand unless they've lived it.

Burroughs talked about how saying goodbye to his teammates was "the hardest thing I've ever had to do." Gay's voice cracked and tears welled in his eyes as he discussed leaving his "family." Hunt was overcome with emotion while trying to articulate his feelings on the subject, having to leave the room to regain his composure.

It was heartbreaking.

"We've kind of built a brotherhood; we pretty much hang out every day," noted Braden Christoffer, who took Burroughs' place as the Pats' captain. "We're going to be lifetime friends but it's just not the same when you depend on them every day. You're away from your parents and other people you love. Those are the guys I leaned on and they could lean on me any time. They knew that. It's not fun to watch your friends leave."

It's also a side of the deadline that not many see but everyone should experience, just to understand the impact it has on their teenage lives. It's all fun and games until you're the one saying goodbye.

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