

NHL ASKED FOR DECISION ON OLYMPICS BY END OF APRIL

NEW YORK: The NHL may be nearing a deadline to decide whether to allow the world's best hockey players to participate in the Winter Olympics next year in South Korea.

"I hope we can find a compromise in the next two or three weeks," International Ice Hockey Federation President Rene Fasel told The Associated Press on Thursday in a telephone interview from Russia. "We need to know by the end of April if they're coming, or not." Fasel said leaders of national teams, including those in Canada and Russia, have recently told him they need to know next month if it is time for them to assemble their Plan B rosters. The IIHF is the game's international governing body and runs hockey tournaments, including those at the Olympics.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman has made it clear league owners don't want to stop their season for three weeks again and

put their stars at risk of injury without what they consider a tangible return. The reluctance has come up in the past and yet the NHL has participated in every Winter Olympics since 1998. Four years ago, the discussions weren't settled until midsummer 2013 ahead of the Sochi Games.

This time, however, there seems to be an impasse. After the International Olympic Committee indicated it did not want to cover costs for travel and insurance expenses to get NHL players to South Korea as it did in the past, including about \$14 million for the 2014 Olympics, the IIHF came up with the \$10 million necessary to do it. That, however, does not appear to be enough to appease the NHL. The league seems to want more, including the rights to put Olympic highlights on its TV network, website and social media platforms.

"In the absence of any material change to

the current status quo, NHL players will not be participating in the 2018 Winter Olympics," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly wrote in an email to AP. Don Fehr, the head of the NHL Players' Association, said all players in the league want to participate. He believes the NHL should choose to take advantage of the chance to market the game in Asia, which will host the next two Winter Olympics.

"Playing in an Olympic games is fundamentally different than playing in other tournaments, other hockey events, because it's an opportunity to play for your country on a global stage with fans watching who never otherwise watch hockey games," Fehr said. "There's a patriotic element, too, which players feel and feel very strongly and it's something we should applaud and be proud of for them. And to take that opportunity away would be most, most unfortunate." The NHL

has acknowledged it isn't excited about the prospects of marketing the sport in South Korea, but it is very interested in being part of the 2022 Olympics in China.

Fasel suggested that might not be an option. "If they don't go to Korea, it will be very difficult for them to go to Beijing," Fasel said. "The IOC will be in a different position and it would be a totally different deal on the table for the NHL. The NHL has more to lose than to win if they don't come to Pyeongchang. If they don't come, they will isolate themselves. The fans will not be happy and the players won't be happy and then I would say, 'Good luck with negotiations to go to China.'" Even if the NHL doesn't set up next season's schedule with an Olympic break, Washington Capitals and Russian superstar Alex Ovechkin has vowed to go to the 2018 Olympics and he may not be the only one to test the league's stance. — AP

CAPITALS BEAT BLUE JACKETS IN SHOOTOUT

WASHINGTON: T.J. Oshie scored the shootout winner as the Washington Capitals overcame a stellar performance from Columbus goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky to beat the Blue Jackets 2-1 in the NHL on Thursday night. Despite 44 saves from Bobrovsky, the Capitals reached 104 points and extended their lead atop the Metropolitan Division and NHL standings. Oshie engendered memories of his Sochi Olympic shootout performance by again beating Bobrovsky, the goalie he scored on four times in six chances that day. Dmitry Orlov finally cracked Bobrovsky early in the third period on Washington's 35th shot of the game. Orlov's goal tied the score after Seth Jones beat Braden Holtby on a wild scramble early in the third for his first goal since Feb. 7. Holtby had 29 saves in regulation and overtime and three more in the shootout to pick up his 38th victory of the season, one shy of Bobrovsky for the league lead.

SENATORS 2, PENGUINS 1

Kyle Turris and Bobby Ryan scored in the shootout to lift the Ottawa Senators over the Pittsburgh Penguins. Mike Hoffman scored in regulation for the Senators and Mike Condon finished with 34 saves, including two incredible point-blank stops in overtime to keep the game going. Nick Bonino had the goal in regulation for the Penguins and Matt Murray stopped 29 shots. After being outplayed for much of the first two periods, the Senators were much better in the third and tied the score 1-1 on the power play at 9:43 as Hoffman beat Murray over the shoulder with a wrist shot just 14 seconds after Matt Cullen was penalized for holding.

LIGHTNING 6, BRUINS 3

Nikita Kucherov had his third career hat trick to lead Tampa Bay past the Boston Bruins, snapping the Lightning's three-game losing streak. Jonathan Drouin had a goal and two assists, Brayden Point had a goal and an assist and Anton Stralman also scored to help the Lightning pull three points behind the Bruins for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference. Peter Budaj finished with 28 saves for the Lightning to earn his 29th win of the season. Ondrej Palat had three assists, and Jake Dotchin and Victor Hedman added two each. Riley Nash had a goal and an assist for Boston, and David Pastrnak and Zdeno Chara also scored. Tuukka Rask stopped 23 shots as Boston, which won seven of the first eight games under interim coach Bruce Cassidy, has now lost four straight and six of 11.



WASHINGTON: Lukas Sedlak #45 of the Columbus Blue Jackets checks Marcus Johansson #90 of the Washington Capitals during the second period at Verizon Center on Thursday in Washington, DC. — AFP

PANTHERS 3, COYOTES 1

Jonathan Marchessault scored two goals and James Reimer made 22 saves to lift the Florida Panthers over the Arizona Coyotes. Shawn Thornton also scored a goal as the Panthers snapped a two-game losing streak. The Panthers are seven points behind the Boston Bruins for the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference's Atlantic Division. Tobias Rieder scored for Arizona, and Mike Smith stopped 36 shots. The Coyotes lost for the fourth time in five games.

HURRICANES 4, CANADIENS 1

Lee Stempniak scored twice and the Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Montreal Canadiens to extend their point streak to nine games and keep their playoff hopes alive. Elias Lindholm and Jeff Skinner also scored for the Hurricanes, while Eddie Lack stopped 21 shots. Carolina, undefeated in regulation time in nine straight games (6-0-3), is five points out of the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference with 10 regular-season games left. Alex Galchenyuk scored the lone goal for Montreal. Carey Price stopped 19 of 22 shots.

MAPLE LEAFS 4, DEVILS 2

Auston Matthews had two assists and William Nylander had a goal and an assist as the Toronto Maple Leafs topped the New Jersey Devils for their seventh win in nine games. Nylander set a franchise rookie mark by extending his points streak to 10 games, while equaling another team record for pow-

er-play points with 25. Mitch Marner also matched a club rookie record for assists with his 40th, setting up James van Riemsdyk's 23rd of the season. Josh Leivo and Connor Brown also scored for the Leafs, and Curtis McElhinney made 30 saves to earn the win. John Moore scored both goals for the Devils, with Keith Kinkaid allowing three goals on 29 shots.

LUIS 4, CANUCKS 1

Magnus Paajarvi scored twice to lead the St. Louis Blues past the Vancouver Canucks. Kyle Brodziak and Alex Pietrangolo also scored for the Blues, who won their fourth straight to give them nine wins in their last 10. Jake Allen made 27 saves for his seventh win in eight starts while allowing just nine goals in the stretch. Henrik Sedin scored for the Canucks, who have lost seven of their last eight to fall to 11-22-3 on the road. Ryan Miller stopped 30 shots. Brodziak snapped an 11-game goal-scoring drought when he roofed a slap shot by Miller late in the second period for his eighth goal of the season to put the Blues up 2-1.

PREDATORS 3, FLAMES 1

Pekka Rinne made 24 saves to lead the Nashville Predators over the Calgary Flames. Calle Jarnkrok, Colton Sissons and Ryan Ellis scored, and Colin Wilson had two assists for Nashville, which has won five of six. Dougie Hamilton had the lone goal for Calgary. After winning 17 of 21, the Flames have lost two straight.

FLYERS 3, WILD 1

Matt Read scored the tiebreaking goal in the second period and Steve Mason stopped 24 shots as the Philadelphia Flyers beat the Minnesota Wild. Sean Couturier and Jakub Voracek also scored for the Flyers, who won for the third time in their last eight games (3-5-0). Zach Parise scored for Minnesota and Devin Dubnyk stopped 24 shots for the Wild, who have lost six of their last seven.

BLACKHAWKS 3, STARS 2, SO

Patrick Kane scored his team-leading 33rd goal in regulation and connected again in the shootout as the Chicago Blackhawks beat the Dallas Stars to open an eight-point lead for first place in the Central Division. Artemi Panarin also scored in the shootout as Chicago rode a 42-save effort by Corey Crawford through overtime to improve to 6-0-1 in its last seven. It was also the Blackhawks' 18th win in their last 22 games. Marian Hossa scored his 24th goal of the season midway through the third period. Crawford was beaten only by Tyler Seguin in the shootout and twice in regulation by Ales Hemsky as he rebounded from giving up four goals on 10 shots to Vancouver on Tuesday night.

OILERS 7, AVALANCHE 4

Drake Caggiula and Jordan Eberle scored 1:10 apart to break a tie late in the third period as the Edmonton Oilers rallied to beat the Colorado Avalanche. Eberle scored twice in Edmonton's five-goal third period and also added an assist. Zack Kassian and Leon Draisaitl also scored in the rally that moved Edmonton into a tie with Anaheim for second in the Pacific Division with 89 points. Andrej Sekera had a goal and two assists, Milan Lucic also scored and Laurent Brossoit had five saves in relief of Cam Talbot to lead Edmonton to the win. Mikko Rantanen had two goals, J.T. Compher and Rene Bourque had a goal each and Nathan MacKinnon finished with two assists for Colorado.

KINGS 5, JETS 2

Drew Doughty, Marian Gaborik and Anze Kopitar each scored a power-play goal as the Los Angeles Kings kept their slim playoff hopes alive with a win over the Winnipeg Jets. Ben Bishop made 19 saves and Tanner Pearson and Jake Muzzin also scored for the Kings, who trail Nashville for the second wild card in the Western Conference by eight points with nine games to play. Gaborik put the Kings ahead 2:01 into the third period, and Doughty doubled the lead 1:56 later as Los Angeles emphatically broke out of a 1-for-13 slump with the man advantage. — AP