



Columbus to host 2013 NHL All-Star festivities

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By Dan Rosen - NHL.com Senior Writer

OTTAWA – Calling it “something positive to work from,” Blue Jackets President Mike Priest on Saturday expressed his excitement that the 12-year-old franchise in Columbus has been selected by the National Hockey League to host the 2013 All-Star festivities.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman announced Saturday after the Board of Governors meeting that the next All-Star Game will be played Jan. 27, 2013 at Nationwide Arena in Columbus. The 2013 Molson Canadian NHL Skills competition is scheduled for Jan. 26.

“This is one of the NHL’s marquee events, where we take a weekend to celebrate all that is great about our game and the stars of our game, and we do that with our fans,” Priest told NHL.com after Bettman’s press conference. “We’ve had a very good year on a lot of fronts from the business perspective, but it is certainly overshadowed by the challenges that we’ve had competitively. This is another way for us to celebrate with our fans.”

Priest said the Blue Jackets have entered into a new naming rights agreement on their home building with Nationwide Insurance and finalized a lease agreement with local government that will keep the team in the market for another 28 years. He added that the Blue Jackets have found a way to increase attendance by 6-7 percent despite being in the middle of a season that has fallen short of expectations after an aggressive offseason.

Columbus is last in the NHL with 32 points. It’s only representative here for All-Star Weekend is rookie Ryan Johansen.

“It’s a piece of good news that we can really build on,” Blue Jackets GM Scott Howson said of the All-Star Game announcement. “We haven’t had a lot of good news since the season started, so it’s a really nice piece of news for us to start building some momentum.”

Priest said the Blue Jackets started to build momentum toward Saturday’s announcement after successfully hosting the NHL Draft in 2007. However, they submitted a bid to host the All-Star Game in 2013, 2014 or 2015 roughly 18 months ago.

One of the key facets to getting the NHL to bring the All-Star Game into the market was to finalize the re-structuring of their lease arrangement with the local government.

“The League, ever since the Draft, has felt the timing would be right and they’ve said we would get an opportunity, they just couldn’t tell us when,” Priest said. “Given the fact that we were able to conclude the restructure, the commitment and many of the other good things we have going on, the timing was right.”

Bettman expressed excitement to bring another marquee NHL event to Columbus.

“The Blue Jackets did a terrific job in hosting the NHL Draft in 2007 and we have no doubt that we’ll have a good time there with the All-Star Game,” he said. “We look forward to bringing all of these events and all of our guests to Columbus.”

Priest said hosting the Draft gave the franchise

and the city the blueprint needed for hosting a major NHL event.

“Our whole community comes together for these events,” Priest said. “That’s one of the exciting things about this; our city will embrace this whole event. The whole city will take hold of the support of it. We’ll do that all in the arena district, which is just a phenomenal place. Visitors will be able to walk to the events, and if there is any kind of commuting it’s a short distance. We have a terrific backdrop for it and we’re well-prepared to do it.”

He estimates that roughly \$12 million will be generated for the city based solely on visitor spending.

“Then there is generally a multiplier that can be applied to that for your general spending,” Priest said. “I believe Ottawa uses more of a multiplier approach, but they’re reporting as much as \$30 million. It depends on the measure, but it’s a significant economic impact on your community.”

Priest is also hoping Saturday’s announcement and the upcoming buzz will have a significant impact on his team.

“It’s going to be hard to add more pressure than there is going to be on this organization to play better hockey, but I think in some regards it may impact the team,” Priest said. “They (the Senators) came off a tough year last year and they found a good way, and that certainly makes everybody feel better. I’ll take whatever it can be that turns that key over.”

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