

SPORTS

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PIERRE OBENDRAUF/THE GAZETTE

"I think we have a good group of players and we made progress," Canadiens owner Geoff Molson said Thursday.

CANADIENS OWNER looks to the future after a season of positive steps forward

Molson proud of team

Canadiens owner Geoff Molson was disappointed with the way this season ended, but is proud of the progress the team made during the lockout-shortened campaign that ended with a first-round playoff loss to the Ottawa Senators.

"I think we have a good group of players and we made progress," Molson said Thursday following a press conference to announce the start of construction on the Tour des Canadiens, a luxury condominium development that will be built adjacent to the Bell Centre.

"You could tell that this was a close team even during the lockout, with the players texting each other and keeping in touch," Molson added.

"We had some outstanding performances from our rookies and we had some other young players grow into leadership roles. I'm proud of players like P.K. (Subban) and Carey (Price). We had good coaching, but it all starts at the top and I'm not talking about me. I'm talking about (general manager Marc Bergevin). He lives hockey and our success starts with him."

Molson said he was impressed with the consistency of the team's performance.

"We didn't have any bad stretches until the end when we ran into injury problems," Molson said. "But we went a long way toward



PAT HICKEY

building for the future. We're headed in the right direction."

Molson took advantage of Thursday's press conference to announce plans to relocate Centennial Plaza, which is being uprooted to make room for the condo development. The plaza will be moved to the Windsor Court on the east side of the building.

The monuments commemorating the retired jerseys, the team's 24 Stanley Cup teams and the mosaic of historic moments will be moved, along with four bronze statues representing Canadiens greats Howie Morenz, Maurice (Rocket) Richard, Jean Béliveau and Guy Lafleur. The team will also replace the 12,000 bricks that fans purchased during the team's centennial celebrations in 2008.

Molson also confirmed that due to the risk of damage inherent in the removal and storage of existing bricks, the club would absorb the cost of ordering an entirely new set of bricks complete with the original inscriptions made by fans.

"By becoming Centennial Plaza brick owners, our fans showed their deep attach-

ment to the team (and) as a result they became an integral part of the plaza," Molson said. "It's very important to us as an organization to take centre stage in what will become a permanent historic site for the Montreal Canadiens."

That was the idea the first time around, but the land on the west side of the building belongs to Cadillac Fairview, one of the major partners in the condo development. The Windsor Court property belongs to the Canadiens.

The partners in the project — Cadillac Fairview, Canderel and Fonds immobilier de solidarité FTQ — said construction will begin on the project after what were described as record-breaking sales. The project is 99 per cent sold, with the only unsold units two penthouse apartments with pricetags starting at \$833,000.

"It is no surprise that the unprecedented enthusiasm elicited for the project allows us to begin construction in record-breaking time, even with the recent addition of two floors," said Daniel Peritz, Canderel's senior vice-president.

Sal Iacono, the senior vice-president of portfolio and development management for Cadillac Fairview, said the condominium was part of a \$2-billion facelift for the area surrounding the Bell Centre. Construction has already

begun at La Tour Deloitte, a 26-floor office and retail complex on a site to the east of the Bell Centre.

While the Canadiens are listed as a partner in the project, Molson noted the team's involvement is minimal.

"We're not in the real estate business," Molson said.

The team has lent its name to the project and will manage a sports bar on the ground-floor level of the development. Molson said the idea for the sports bar was inspired by the popular Real Sports restaurant/bar adjacent to the Air Canada Centre in Toronto, but "it will be different."

Vail invited to Team USA camp: Canadiens prospect Brady Vail was one of 40 players invited to the Team USA national junior training camp in August in Lake Placid, N.Y. Vail, a 6-foot, 185-pound centre, was the Canadiens' fourth-round pick (94th overall) at the 2012 National Hockey League entry draft. In 68 games this past season with the Ontario Hockey League's Windsor Spitfires, he posted 20-35-55 totals and was minus-23. He finished the season with the American Hockey League's Hamilton Bulldogs, posting 1-3-4 totals and a plus-2 in 12 games.

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Voynov shows knack for playoff dramatics

LOS ANGELES

Luc Robitaille, Wayne Gretzky, Slava Voynov.

As they say on Sesame Street, which one of these things is not like the others?

Robitaille's nickname in his playing days was "Lucky," based in part on the number of big goals he scored for the Los Angeles Kings.

But luck didn't have much to do with it. The law of averages did. He played 94 playoff games over 11 post-seasons in L.A., scoring 41 goals, so it stands to reason that he also holds the team record for playoff game-winners, nine.

Gretzky was only involved in five playoff runs during his years with the Kings, but scored 29 goals in those 60 games, so the only surprise about his five game-winners is that the number isn't higher.

Voynov? The 23-year-old Russian defenceman is in just his second playoff season, operating with a significant language barrier, and he's already nipping at Gretzky's heels, tied for third (with Butch Goring) in Kings history at four GWGs — all four of them this spring, which neither Robitaille nor The Great One managed in a single Kings' playoff season.

His name is all over the game notes: seven points his last six games, his five goals in a single playoff year already a team record for defencemen, the four GWGs a club record for any skater, and a team-leading plus-10.

Other than that, how's it going?

"Well, it is fluky that he's in the same category with (Robitaille and Gretzky)," says Kelly Hradey, the goalie-turned-TV analyst who played with both of them, "but Voynov's game has grown tremendously. He's really taken a leadership role with the puck, and what I like about him is when he makes a bad play, he doesn't go to the bench and sulk and lose himself. He goes right out there and plays."

Unusual for a young player?

"Totally," said Hradey. "I was talking to a young defenceman earlier this year and he told me that the one problem he has, if he makes a mistake early, it crushes him. Like, he can't recover. You look at (L.A. rookie Jake) Muzzin, and he's a pretty good young player, but if he makes a mistake he gets frazzled pretty quick."

"And Voynov just looks to me like he puts it behind him. That's a rare quality."

That, of course, doesn't explain how a defenceman ends



CAM COLE

up alongside luminaries who had dominating careers and might expect to top such lists.

Voynov may never score big goals at this pace again his whole career — take, for example, his Game 3 winner in Tuesday's 3-1 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks, which teammate Justin Williams called a "broken-bat single." Voynov stepped into a slapshot, his stick snapped in two and the puck somehow kept going in the general direction of the net, so slowly that it completely handcuffed goalie Corey Crawford.

"He'll never, ever score a luckier goal," said Hradey.

But Kings coach Darryl Sutter, while acknowledging that luck and circumstance have played into Voynov's streak — "I wish there were some other guys on our team that had more game-winning goals," he said, only half-joking — contends that it's more than just a goofy coincidence.

"We put him in position to succeed a lot," Sutter said. "Quite honestly, he has more opportunities to shoot the puck than most guys on the team, it's the way it's set up for him, so we expect him to take full advantage of it."

"No, he's awesome," said Kings veteran Matt Greene. "He's been great for us the whole time and I think it's good that he's getting some of this recognition. He's been awesome night in and night out. Since the day he got here, he's been a top-four defenceman and he's always had that offence in him, shoots it really well, smart player."

"He's just scratching the surface, he'll be good for a long time."

Sutter couldn't even remember if Voynov was with the team, or in the minors, when he took over the coaching reins halfway through last season.

But paired with Rob Scuderi, Voynov has become a third solid right-hand defenceman, along with Drew Doughty and Matt Greene, and though he's not big, he doesn't play timidly.

Voynov, a man of few words, at least in English — "I think he knows more than he lets on," said Scuderi — analyzes the team's approach this way:

"Play physical, simple in D-zone, quick in middle zone. Get our chances, score goals."

Preferably game-winning goals. Simple