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Owners end dispute, season to start soon

CHICAGO (AP)—Baseball is back! Owners accepted the players' back-to-work offer Sunday, never even taking a lock-out vote that would have prevented real major leaguers from reporting to spring training camps.

"It was not a surrender, the players were on strike," acting commissioner Bud Selig said. "They made an unconditional offer to come back, and we accepted that offer."

"It feels good to talk about the season starting, talking about baseball. We are back and will open April 26. It's not anything I want to go through again."

Among those happy that the longest labor dispute in sports history was over was President Clinton. He took time from a round of golf in Little Rock, Ark., to cheer baseball's return and urge both sides to make a long-term settlement.

"Today's decision is good news for the game of baseball, its fans and the local economies of the cities where baseball is played," Clinton said. "While I am heartened to know this season will start with major league players, there are a number of underlying issues which still need to get resolved."

Under the tentative agreement, players could report to training camp Wednesday and would have to be there by Friday. Each team would play 144 games, 18 fewer than the original schedule. That would result in the cancellation of the season's first 252 games, raising the total wiped out by the strike to 921 since last August.

"The clubs hope that the 1995 season — including the postseason — will be played without interruption," Selig said. "We hope our fans never again have to go through the heartache we've endured the last eight months."

Reached at his home in Rye Brook, N.Y., union head Don Fehr said the owners' decision was a "step in the right direction."

"If they had voted for a lockout, it would have been a clear indication they didn't want peace — at any price," he said.

Still to be resolved in the back-to-work agreement were matters such as dates for re-offering contracts, salary arbitration filing and similar areas. Lawyers for both sides were in contact throughout the day.

Asked when contract negotiations would resume, Fehr said he expected to be contacted by Selig after the meeting.

Six Islamic extremists killed in Gaza explosion

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Islamic extremists preparing a bomb set off a blast Sunday that ripped through their hideout, killing six people, including a militant leader who was high on Israel's most-wanted list.

Police found seven unexploded bombs, an automatic rifle, grenades and a plastic bag with 55 pounds of poisonous powder in the second-floor apartment in a crowded residential neighborhood, said Brig. Gen. Ghazi Jabali, head of PLO police in Gaza City.

A police bomb expert walked from the apartment clutching three canisters studded with nails, used to enhance a blast's killing power.

"They were preparing an explosive when one bomb blew up," Jabali said. "This shows that those in the apartment had a total disregard for the lives of those living around them."

The Hamas fundamentalist group's military wing, Izzedine al-Qassam, denied its members had been preparing explosives and, in a leaflet, accused Israel and the PLO of being behind the bombing.

The underground group acknowledged that one of its leaders, Kamal Ismail Hafez Kahil, was killed in the blast. He was wanted by both Israel and the Palestinian self-rule government; Israeli media said he had been near the top of Israel's most-wanted list.

Kahil, 32, was a suspect in the 1993 killing of Lt. Col. Meir Mintz, the highest-ranking Israeli killed during Israel's occupation of Gaza, which ended last year under an Israeli-PLO treaty.

Hamas opposes the peace treaty and has carried out recent suicide bomb attacks in Israel trying to derail it.



News... in a Minute

Aftershocks shake Japan

TOKYO (AP)—Two aftershocks rattled northwestern Japan on Sunday, the day after a 6.0-magnitude earthquake damaged hundreds of buildings and forced nearly 300 people to seek refuge in shelters.

No injuries or damage were reported in the aftershocks. Saturday's quake injured 39 people and damaged 504 buildings and houses, said police spokesman Tokuji Komagata in Niigata, 160 miles northwest of Tokyo.

Sunday's first aftershock had a magnitude of 5.2, the Central Meteorological Agency said. The second, eight hours later, had a magnitude of 4.2.

The agency said the aftershocks, like Saturday's quake, were centered in northern Niigata district.

The earthquake that killed 5,500 people in the Kobe area of western Japan on Jan. 17 had a magnitude of 7.2.

No progress in GM strike

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP)—General Motors Corp. and autoworkers ended a second day of talks Sunday without settling a strike that has halted production of hot-selling pickups. Negotiations were to resume Monday morning between GM and the Auto Workers Union.

About 5,500 workers at GM's Pontiac East truck plant walked out Friday morning in a dispute over claims of labor shortages and a lack of job security.

Negotiators made some progress Saturday, but didn't advance much in five hours Sunday, said Jim Abare, spokesman for UAW Local 594.

GM spokeswoman Sherrie Childers would not comment on the talks Sunday.

The union wants the company to create jobs at the plant for 1,500 workers whose positions were eliminated when GM closed its Pontiac West truck assembly plant in December.

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