

Winter Classic will host NHL's top rivals

By Alan Robinson
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PITTSBURGH -- Mike Knuble teed up a puck on a wooden platform a few inches above Heinz Field's green grass and lofted a perfectly placed wrist shot between the upshots.

Call it the first goal by an NHL player on the Pittsburgh Steelers' home turf. Or was it the first field goal?

On a postcard-perfect midsummer 85-degree day — one that was 47 degrees above the average high temperature for Jan. 1 in Pittsburgh — the sight of the Penguins' Sidney Crosby, the Capitals' Knuble and three other players exhibiting their skills Tuesday while previewing the NHL Winter Classic illustrated the not-uncomfortable juxtaposition between football and hockey.

For one day, hockey will enjoy a change of venue as the Capitals and Penguins shift what might be the sport's best rivalry — even NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said so — into one of the NFL's best-known stadiums.

As the NHL drew up prelimi-

nary plans for a game that will showcase Crosby and Alex Ovechkin to the sport's biggest single-game TV audience outside of the Stanley Cup finals, it realized a hockey rink fits perfectly for spectators between Heinz's 20-yard lines.

Center ice will be at the 50. There was no such comfortable fit when the Winter Classic rink was wedged into baseball's Fenway Park and Wrigley Field the last two seasons.

Go outside and play, indeed. "We're going to have an unbelievable chance to make great memories in a special event like this," Crosby said. "It seems like this is a great setup. I don't know what the baseball stadiums were like, but this one seems like a pretty normal fit."

Even the matchup seems perfectly suited to the one-game-can-mean-everything environment so prevalent in football. While Capitals vs. Penguins on New Year's Day will be only one of 82 regular-season games for both teams, it will mean more than that.

For Ovechkin, who might be the NHL's most skilled offensive talent but doesn't yet have a Stanley Cup

title to prove it, it's a chance to upstage his biggest rival on Crosby's home ice. For Crosby, it's an opportunity to be the biggest star in not one but two Winter Classics; he won the first in Buffalo in 2008 with a shootout goal.

How big is the rivalry becoming?

Penguins forward Max Talbot is glad Ovechkin wasn't in Heinz Field with Capitals teammates Knuble and David Steckel because he "hates" him.

"It's obviously a big rivalry," Talbot said.

"I remember this past season when I was hurt and watching a game against Washington (the Capitals' 5-4 overtime win on Feb. 7) and it was probably the most intense regular-season game I've seen."

The rivalry already is so good — the teams' seven-game Eastern Conference playoff series two seasons ago was one of the NHL's most compelling in years — Crosby doesn't believe it will intensify by moving outdoors.

"I don't think you can imagine it being more intense than it already is," Crosby said. "It's there."

The Winter Classic will add one



Keith Skrakovic/AP

Washington Capitals forward Mike Knuble (right) poses with Sidney Crosby during a Winter Classic press event at Heinz Field Tuesday.

element to the rivalry, and it might be snow.

As many as 12½ inches have fallen on Pittsburgh on a single day during the first week of January, and the mean temperature is in the high 20s.

While some Januarys are

milder than others, some are downright miserable.

"Maybe the first half it will be sunny, and the second half a storm will be coming in," Knuble said. "That will make it fun for everybody. A little bit of chaos is pretty fun."

Ravens rookie Cody fails fitness test in camp

By David Ginsburg
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER



Dustin Compton/AP

Terrence Cody runs the 40-yard dash at Alabama's pro day last year.

WESTMINSTER, Md. -- Draft pick Terrence Cody failed his conditioning test Tuesday and was not permitted to participate in the team's first training camp practice.

The 360-pound defensive tackle out of Alabama signed a three-year contract Monday and arrived at McDaniel College eager to launch his NFL career. But after flunking his physical, he was placed on the Physically Unable to Perform list (PUP).

"Part of our process is everybody's got to pass the conditioning

test to be sure they're ready to compete," coach John Harbaugh said after Tuesday's practice.

"It's going to be hot out here, our practices are fast. We've got to be sure guys are physically ready to practice at the pace we're practicing at."

"So, when he passes the conditioning test, he'll practice."

Years ago, Cody weighed over 400 pounds. After falling to the second round on draft day, he said, "I felt it was my weight and stuff that dropped me to this late."

And now, his NFL career will get off to a late start.

"I'm not surprised. Every year certain guys struggle with that," Harbaugh said.

"Guys learn there's a certain level of expectation in terms of

conditioning that goes with being an NFL player, especially for this team. So he's going to have to get himself in the type of shape he needs to be in."

Cody was drafted 57th overall by the Ravens.

Baltimore's other second-round pick, linebacker Sergio Kindle of Texas, fractured his skull while falling down a flight of stairs last week and will probably miss the entire camp.

Ten players are currently on Baltimore's PUP list: Cody; safety Ed Reed; cornerbacks Fabian Washington, Lardarius Webb, Prince Miller and Walt Harris; linebacker Brendon Ayanbadejo; offensive tackle Oniel Cousins; running back Matt Lawrence; and wide receiver Rodelin Anthony.

QB suspension remains unsettled

The Steelers are unsure if Ben Roethlisberger's six-game suspension will be reduced.

By Alan Robinson
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PITTSBURGH -- The Pittsburgh Steelers expect to go through most or all of training camp without knowing the exact date when quarterback Ben Roethlisberger can play again.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell plans to visit the Steelers' camp on Aug. 5, but the steel is not specifically related to Roethlisberger's six-game suspension for violating the NFL's personal conduct policy.

Goodell is visiting seven training camps during the first week of August.

Goodell said the suspension could be reduced by two games if Roethlisberger has no more behavioral issues and does all that is asked by the league. Roethlisberger was suspended April 21 after being accused of, but not charged with, sexually assaulting a Georgia college student in March.

"Toward the end of training camp is the timetable to find out,"

Steelers president Art Rooney II said Tuesday.

The Steelers' final preseason game is Sept. 2. They open the season at home Sept. 12 at Atlanta, but the earliest that the two-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback can return is Oct. 17 against Cleveland. Should Goodell decide not to reduce the suspension, Roethlisberger couldn't play until Oct. 31 in New Orleans.

"All we're concerned about is Ben and, at this point, it's six games," director of football operations Kevin Colbert said. "Whether it gets reduced or not, it's up to the commissioner."

The uncertainty over when Roethlisberger can play could make an already challenging Steelers training camp even more difficult. Coach Mike Tomlin must find enough snaps in camp and during the exhibition games for Roethlisberger and the starter at the beginning of the season — almost certainly, Byron Leftwich. Leftwich took nearly all the snaps with the starters when Roethlisberger was barred from practicing during the offseason.

The Steelers also want to prepare third-year quarterback Dennis Dixon, who started one game last season. Longtime backup Charlie Batch is also on the roster.

"I don't think they have a set rotation, I don't think they have an exact 1-2-3 order," Colbert said of the coaches. "I think over the course of the preseason they'll get that. They also have to factor in how much work Ben will get knowing that he won't be available for the minimum of four games."

While teams always work with multiple quarterbacks during camp, this is the first time an NFL team has known it must prepare two starting quarterbacks because of a suspension.

"No question it's an unusual situation and it's a challenge for our coaching staff and our guys, but I think we can have the guys who can do it," Rooney said. "I know they're determined to get it right. I think by the time the season opens we'll be ready."

The Steelers open camp Friday at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, with their first practice the following day.

Roethlisberger can practice throughout the end of camp, but is barred from all team activities while suspended.

Whenever Roethlisberger returns, Colbert has no worries about him being ready to play despite the lack of practicing. Roethlisberger threw for a career-high 4,328 yards last season, with 26 touchdown passes.

HAND OF GONE



Fernando Llano/AP

Diego Maradona pauses to answer questions after a meeting Tuesday. Maradona was removed as manager of Argentina's national soccer team after his demands were rejected.



Steph Witt/Collegian

Kelson Brown gets a hit earlier this season. Brown played college baseball under ex-Yankee Scott Brosius and still talks to his old coach often.

Spikes

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Barnett in 1997 to be drafted from Linfield.

"I was just thrilled," said Brosius, who was the 2010 Northwest Conference Coach of the Year. "I was pumped for him. This is something he's worked so hard for. He's been a very dedicated worker and has a true passion to play and loves to be on the field."

Brown, a native of La Canada, Calif., has had a solid start to his professional baseball career with the Spikes, the Pirates' short-season Class A affiliate. He is tied for second on the team with 35 hits and is tied for third with 18 RBI. Many of his hits has served to the opposite way in right field, a skill he learned from Brosius.

After Brown, who played shortstop in college, managed only one hit in 13 at-bats his freshman and sophomore seasons combined, Brosius helped the rising junior alter his approach from the batter's box.

Brosius said when players reach the collegiate level, he included, one of the biggest things they have to learn is to stay inside

the ball and drive it to the opposite field. Brosius had Brown work on this, and he hit .370 in 18 games during his junior campaign. He continued to work, and in his senior year compiled a .443 average with a school record 483 hits and 72 RBI, starting in all 50 games.

"At the [Division III] level you get a lot of pitchers with not a lot of velocity so they throw away a lot," said Brown, who was the 2010 Northwest Conference Player of the Year. "In order to be successful you have to learn how to hit the ball the other way and let the ball travel. We worked on it so much and it's paid off."

Brown attributes a lot of success to Brosius' coaching. The Spike referenced a series his senior year at Linfield when his swing was feeling good and he recalled having ten hits in a four-game span. That didn't stop Brosius from continuing to push his pupil.

"The next day he comes up to me and he says 'You know what. Were going to work something on hitting because I noticed something,'" Brosius recalled with a smile. "And I was like 'Are you kidding me? I just had ten hits.' But that was him. He realized that I could be more, and pushed me and I'm thankful for that."

Brosius and Brown have kept in touch even though Brown is busy with the Spikes, playing in all but four of State College's 36 games thus far.

The mentor hopes to continue being just that.

"The biggest thing is there are a lot of things in baseball that are out of your control," Brosius said. "Decisions, for example, about who moves up or who moves down, those are ultimately not in our control. I think the biggest thing I talk about is you just need to stay focused on yourself and doing the things that you need to do and let those other things take care of itself. It's a great experience, obviously, playing in the minor leagues. I loved it."

The pupil counts on continuing to pick his mentor's brain throughout his minor league career, which he hopes results in an eventual call-up to the major leagues.

"He's going to be a guy that's going to be there for me my entire career," Brown said. "I plan on going back to Oregon and visiting and helping out around the school and field. We're going to keep in touch."

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