One of the few positives to come out of the current NHL work stoppage is the Hockey Fans Fight Cancer initiative, spearheaded by Ross Bonander. I sat down to talk with Ross about his charitable endeavour, and how people can get involved.

Angus: What was the motivation to start the Hockey Fans Fight Cancer (HFFC) movement?

Bonander: By trade I'm a freelance health writer with a focus on the so-called blood cancers—the lymphomas, leukemias and myelomas—so I'm generally cognizant of the Hockey Fights Cancer (HFC) campaign every year well in advance. With the lockout, and with HFC occurring in October, it occurred to me that there was a very real possibility that the league's charity initiative wouldn't happen.

So my first thought was, 'How will this affect the league's charity partners?' I put calls in to three of the four partners: Prostate Cancer Canada, ZERO-The Project to End Prostate Cancer, and the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, and asked them how losing out on those funds would impact their programs.

I didn't call the other partner, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, because I know what their revenues are and HFC's contribution is a fraction of a percent of it.

What did the partner charities tell you?

Well I called the NHL first, and asked them about HFC and the lockout and whether there were other plans being put in place. I got a chilly response from the person I spoke with and then did not receive a call back. That sort of clued me in to the sensitivity of it from a PR standpoint—something that I should have realized before.

At any rate, I then put in calls to the partner charities and got very much the same response as the NHL—nothing. The exception was the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, which sent me a very formal email saying in sum 'no comment.'

I can't speak for them, but surely they value their partnership with the NHL and the NHLPA and maybe they saw going on record as saying, 'Without HFC, we won't be able to conduct outreach programs' or something like it as potentially detrimental. Or they just forgot about me.

So that's when you launched Hockey Fans Fight Cancer?

Pretty much. I did some digging to determine how much money HFC made, and tried to find old press releases and other information that gave me an idea of how the funds the partners receive are dispersed. Cancer patients don't have the luxury of a cancer lockout, so I figured if the league and the PA can't or won't be doing it, the fans might.

What is your goal with this fundraising initiative?

Initially I launched the campaign through Livestrong. I did this because people can donate directly to Livestrong—I personally don't handle any donations. I chose Livestrong because of their high rating according to two charity watchdog groups, and because of how they approach

cancer: they might receive more donations if they called themselves "Livestrong to Cure Cancer" but instead they're dedicated to improving the quality of life of cancer patients, however that might be achieved—providing transportation to appointments, navigating people through the health care system, practical things like that.

From the standpoint of molecular biology and of the disease pathology of cancer, few things are as nonsensical as 'a cure for cancer.' No two cancers are alike. A person with stage IV metastatic cancer of any type doesn't have one disease, they have dozens of diseases. And that's in one person. So while talk of 'cures' might please the public and increase donations, the real, everyday difference is made in finding ways to improve the lives of people with cancer.

So my goal isn't—as some have intimated—to make the NHL or the NHLPA look bad. My goal was and is to help cancer charities make up for the funds lost due to the lockout.

How can people donate? What are their options?

People can donate to the Hockey Fans Fight Cancer campaign at the Livestrong page, found here:

Donate Here

They can also choose to donate to one of the NHL's charity partners, found here:

Donate Here

On top of that, minor pro hockey leagues are stocked with great fundraising campaigns, some of which are documented here.

I know that there are also other hockey-based programs where people can participate, like Hockey Kicks Cancer.
I saw the other day that D'Ann Faught of the Dallas Stars began a fundraising page for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's annual Light the Night Walk. So there are options.

From the start I've believed that hockey fans are passionate people who care about worthy causes. I don't care which charity they choose. My initiative can go down in flames for all I care, provided people are taking some action and at least making a small $5 donation to some reputable charity, or finding some way to make a positive contribution to their community somehow despite the negative aura created by the lockout.

What happens to Hockey Fans Fight Cancer if the lockout is lifted?

We’re working on that now. I might flip it into a 501(c)3 nonprofit charity of its own, which would give me the ability to directly apply to foundations that issue grants, but more work needs to be done before I can take that step. Ideally I would love to have some partners sign on who can, for example, hold fully transparent and auditable charity auctions to benefit the cause, auctions that might include donated game-worn jerseys, things like that.

Hockey Fans Fight Cancer was kind of born in a moment, social media carried it much more quickly than I ever expected, and right now I'm trying to find some of the potential long-term, lasting benefits of the movement.

Ideally—and I know how pie-in-the-sky this sounds—but ideally I would love to see HFFC as an official charity partner of the NHL some day.

Thanks for taking the time to speak with me, Ross.

Donate Here