The one thing I hate about being a fantasy league commissioner is that it casts me in the Gary Bettman role. Add to that the fact that I have the misfortune of sharing his short stature and admittedly whiny voice, and the needling from my GMs is as predictable as it is annoying.

But I digress. Thanks to the Great Commissioner in the Sky and his merry band of greedy owners, we are all looking down the barrel of yet another work stoppage owners' lockout. It sure sucks the fun out of one of the most exciting times of year for fantasy hockey, doesn't it? Every moment that we put into preparing for our draft is tinged with sadness at the thought that it could all be for naught. The usually heavily anticipated reopening of Yahoo! fantasy hockey last week was met with a collective, "Meh."

Nevertheless, for those of us who seek to bring nobility back to the office of commissioner, and who would sooner sell our firstborn than ever cancel a season, we have a responsibility to

navigate our league through whatever stormy waters our evil NHL counterpart sends our way. And right now, that means preparing for the inevitable lockout.

With the season in doubt, there are a number of issues that a fantasy commissioner must think through:

The 2012 Draft

The first and most obvious question as the uncertainty drags into September is, should we even bother with a draft? This issue will move even more to the forefront if/when a lockout officially begins.

For the GFHL (my league), it's all systems go. On the morning of Sept. 15, we'll gather and draft our squads, while bracing ourselves for the bad news that will almost certainly follow later that very day. Our draft takes place on the same weekend every year, and it's tough for busy managers to be available on short notice. I'd rather move ahead on the appointed day than have to scramble to find a new date that works for everyone a week or month or three months down the road when the start of the season is announced.

We'll be ready for the start of the season on Oct. 11, whether or not there are padlocks on the arena doors. And if the locks come down a month or two later, we'll be ready to roll with no preparation.

Transactions

With the draft behind us, the next question will be how to handle transactions during the stoppage. Player movement may have ground to a standstill in the NHL, but is there any reason for your league to follow suit?

In the GFHL, we don't have a ton of transactions during a normal season. Trades are allowed of course, and players can go up and down from our farm system. Beyond that, teams are permitted just two free agent signings during the season – we don't have constant add/drops happening. So, I see no reason to put a moratorium on these transactions. The trade and free agent markets will be open, and will follow our normal rules. In the unthinkable event of a full season cancellation, we will scrap our customary late-February trade deadline and allow trades right through the season.

For those leagues that have higher transaction limits, you'll need to think about whether or not you want to put limitations on it. Suppose a star player gets hurt while playing in the KHL: will his owner be able to immediately drop and replace him, or will they have to wait until the lockout ends? Or suppose an unowned prospect starts tearing up the AHL: will an astute manager be allowed to slyly claim him and stash him away, or will they have to wait patiently until it's game on again? If you're not going to allow transactions, you may need to establish some parameters for how transactions will be handled when they are eventually reinstituted – will you have a signing free-for-all, or do you need to bring some order to the chaos?

Next Season

Imagine that the 2012-13 season is scrapped, and the owners give their head a shake and fire Bettman's ass next summer. (Hey, it could happen. Or maybe not.) Then they hire a white knight who rides in and comes to a sensible and fair agreement with the players, and 2013-14 is a go.

Will your league hold a 2013 draft, or will you continue with the teams you drafted but never used in 2012? I suspect most commissioners will agree that a 2013 draft will be necessary. A lot will change if the league misses a year. We'll probably never see the likes of Teemu Selanne and Daniel Alfredsson again, for instance. So, in my league we will follow our usual routine next summer, protecting our standard number of players heading into the draft, just as if the 2012-13 season had been played.

Filling the Void

One question remains: if the worst comes to pass, how will you fill the void this season? Are there other things your managers can do together to keep the fun and spirit of competition alive, in defiance of Count Gary's attempts to suck all the joy out of our hockey-loving lives?

There are certainly lots of possibilities. Already I'm hearing whispers of AHL, CHL and KHL pools. Some will turn their attention to football or, god forbid, basketball. Perhaps you could come up with a creative World Junior Championships competition come Christmas time.

What makes it difficult is that any foray into minor or junior fantasy games is likely to require a whole pile of work on their commissioners. It'll be like returning to the dark ages of fantasy sports prior to the advent of online league services that take most of the work out of running a league. Be prepared to spend long hours manually entering stats, or copying and pasting from the AHL website into a spreadsheet. It's tedious work, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

So, let's discuss: how is your league preparing for Lockout 2012?