

Bill would ‘save’ teams

NEW YORK (AP) — Legislation was introduced in Congress on Wednesday to allow lawsuits against baseball when teams fold or relocate, and lawyers for players and owners agreed the union’s grievance to save two teams will be heard next month.

Sen. Paul Wellstone, a Minnesota Democrat, and Rep. John Conyers, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, introduced the Fairness in Antitrust in National Sports Act, which would limit baseball’s exemption from antitrust laws, created by a 1922 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

“Our country has tremendously urgent priorities — we have the war in Afghanistan, the war against terrorism, and our urgent need for economic stimulus legislation to keep our nation from plummeting even further into recession,” Wellstone said.

“Unfortunately, however, major league baseball owners did not give us

a choice on timing. They have picked a particularly inauspicious time to announce their unilateral, shortsighted and self-serving decision so we must respond.”

Baseball owners voted last week to eliminate two teams by next season, and Montreal and Minnesota appear to be the most likely candidates. Wellstone and Conyers, who is from Michigan, attended a news conference along with several House members from Minnesota, hope to exert pressure on baseball owners to reverse their decision.

Baseball commissioner Bud Selig said last week his sport no longer can support financially struggling teams. Wellstone called baseball’s decision to fold two teams “a way for owners to divvy up profits.”

“If GM, Ford and Chrysler tried that in Detroit, we would have a lot of people outraged,” Conyers said.

The bill would allow an “injured” party to sue for antitrust violations — ranging from a government entity to a stadium authority to a baseball player. Other parts of baseball’s antitrust exemption — such as minor league baseball, marketing, sales and intellectual property rights — would remain intact.

“The Minnesota Twins on the northern prairie aren’t just a baseball team. They’re really a way of life, said Rep. Earl Pomeroy, a North Dakota Democrat. “It’s what you listen to when you plant the crop in the spring. It’s what kids talk about when they go to their sandlot ball.”

Congress has traditionally been reluctant to tamper with baseball’s antitrust exemption. In 1998, a law was passed eliminating the exemption only for labor relations involving the major leagues.

“It’s a steep mountain to climb, but we absolutely have to make the effort,” Wellstone said.



Cause of crash not yet known

PLANE, from Page 1

Republic, five people on the ground were killed.

George Black Jr. of the National Transportation Safety Board said his agency would be shutting down its main investigation in New York by Saturday and returning to Washington.

The pace of the investigation was extraordinarily rapid, with both black boxes recovered within 24 hours and most of the plane’s major parts located quickly. But a final determination on the cause could be a year off, investigators cautioned.

American Airlines is doing sample inspections of its remaining 34 Airbus A300s to ensure there are no problems with other tail assemblies.

According to Airbus, no other airline has ordered inspections of the Airbus fleet. Like the Federal Aviation Administration, Airbus awaited more information from investigators before deciding whether to call for inspections. The only other U.S. airlines that fly the plane are the cargo carriers FedEx and UPS.

The plane’s tail assembly sheared away and its twin engines fell off as the jet went down. The 27-foot tail assembly was pulled from Jamaica Bay and taken to a nearby collection center for study. Without the tail, the jetliner would have suffered a loss of stability and turning control.

“This would be the most catastrophic in-flight disaster we’ve ever had. We’ve never had a modern civilian jetliner come apart in flight. It is so unbeliev-

ably catastrophic what happened,” former Transportation Department inspector general Mary Schiavo said.

Composite materials — nonmetal, graphite-like substances — started being used for major structural parts in commercial jetliners in the late 1970s and early ‘80s, Black said.

“They’ve been out there for a while, and we haven’t had any difficulties in this area, but then we also haven’t lost any tails, not in this particular sort of event,” Black said.

Safety records show the same plane was severely shaken when it hit air turbulence at cruising altitude seven years ago in an episode that injured 47 people. Aviation consultant Jim McKenna said the plane could have been weakened by the earlier encounter.

NTSB investigators are reviewing records, interviewing maintenance employees and asking questions about the 1994 incident. They said Wednesday night that they had found the Airbus jet’s maintenance log book — damaged but readable.

Investigators were also considering whether the Japan Air Lines Boeing 747 contributed to the crash by creating wake turbulence, the swirl of air behind a plane that can endanger aircraft flying too close behind or below. The phenomenon has been blamed for at least one deadly crash in the past.

Protocol calls for at least two minutes between takeoffs. However, NTSB chairwoman Marion Blakey said it appeared there was just 1 minute and 45 seconds between Flight 587 and the JAL plane.

Former assistant coach not called by Kansas

LAWRENCE (AP) — Former Ohio State football coach John Cooper says he would be interested in the vacant coaching job at Kansas but has not been contacted by the school, where he was an assistant coach for five years.

Meanwhile, Oklahoma associate head coach Mike Stoops declined to comment on whether he was contacted by Kansas, or whether he would be interested in replacing Terry Allen.

Stoops said he was thinking only about the No. 3-ranked Sooners’ game at Texas Tech this weekend.

“I’m doing my thing here, getting ready to play this game,” Stoops said. “That’s the most important thing right now for me. I’ll just let everything

else take care of itself.”

Stoops would only admit he would like to be a head coach some day.

“It’s always been a goal of mine,” said Stoops, the younger brother of Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops and a former Kansas State assistant under Bill Snyder.

Cooper, a Kansas assistant under Pepper Rodgers and Don Fambrough in 1967-72, compiled a 111-43-4 record with the Buckeyes over a 14-year span. He was let go earlier this year after struggling to records of 3-8 in bowl games and 2-10-1 against Big Ten rival Michigan.

“Yeah, I want to get back into it if it’s the right opportunity for me,” Cooper said. “I’m interested at this point in time.”

Four days of controversy end with player’s release

DENVER (AP) — After four days of controversy and conflicting statements, the Denver Broncos released wide receiver Eddie Kennison on Wednesday.

Saying it was in the best interest of the team, coach Mike Shanahan reached the decision after meeting with his players and coaches earlier in the day.

On Saturday night, about 16 hours before kickoff against San Diego, Kennison told Shanahan he lost his love of the game and was retiring.

The timing of the announcement — after Kennison took all of the snaps in practice as a starting receiver during the week — angered the Broncos and forced the coaches and backup receivers to make frantic adjustments for Sunday’s game.

Shanahan ordered Kennison to leave the team hotel, and the receiver was

inactive for the game.

In a subsequent statement, Kennison said he wasn’t retiring, noting that the illnesses of his wife and father, and disappointment over his lack of productivity on the field led to his meeting with Shanahan.

Kennison contacted Shanahan on Monday and, according to the coach, said he was “unretiring.”

Shanahan delayed a decision on Kennison’s fate until consulting with players and coaches.

Shanahan said Kennison insisted that family problems weren’t part of his disillusionment and that he was considering retirement during mini-camps last spring and training camp last summer.

“The interest was not there to play football,” Shanahan said Wednesday. “He had been thinking about it for a long time.”

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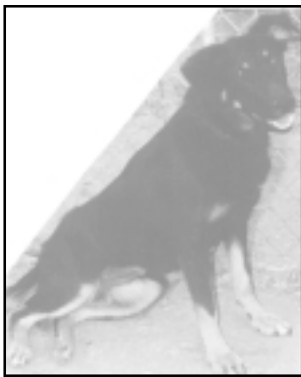
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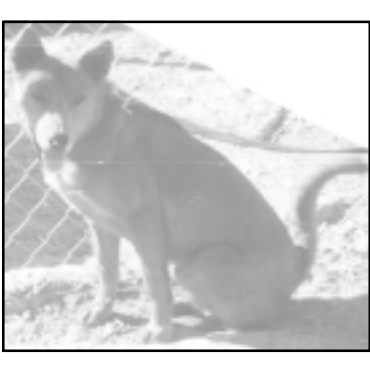
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