

Detroit goalie can almost feel Stanley Cup

DETROIT (AP) — Everything is going Dominik Hasek's way, with the Detroit Red Wings in control of the Stanley Cup finals and the cup so close he can almost feel it in his arms.

So nothing was going to upset his mind-set or his routine, the luck he feels going his way and the moment that soon could be his.

So when Hasek walked into a room filled with reporters and saw a stage and a microphone Tuesday, he shook his head and said, "No" — the same word he's been telling the Carolina Hurricanes for most of the series.

Hasek talked, but not in such a formal setting. To him, sitting on a stage and answering questions should be reserved for only one moment at this time of year, winning the Stanley Cup, and

he wasn't about to push his luck. "I am sort of superstitious," Hasek said Tuesday, the first of consecutive off days before the Red Wings go for the Cup in Game 5 Thursday night. "I said this year, I will go on the stage — but not in the playoffs."

Hasek might want to prepare himself because center stage at the Stanley Cup finals may belong to him very soon.

The goalie who has never won the cup but was seen as the one player the Red Wings needed to win it, Hasek is within one victory of lifting the one major prize in hockey he has never claimed.

He has an Olympic gold medal and enough individual awards that he would seem to be a lock for the Hockey Hall of Fame. Yet, just like Ray Bour-

que a year ago, his portfolio will not be complete unless he wins a championship.

"The goal right from the beginning was to win the Cup," said the 37-year-old Hasek, who asked the Buffalo Sabres to trade him after last season. "I believed this team, with my help, was good enough to be the best in the NHL. ... So my only goal was to win the Cup, because I believed this team was good enough to win it."

If the way he played in Detroit's 3-0 victory in Game 4 on Monday night is an indicator, he is obsessed with winning it.

Hasek ranged far from the net to push passes up the ice — one set up the pivotal goal of the game, by Brett Hull — and to knock the puck off the stick

of Carolina's Erik Cole on a breakaway. That play probably was the biggest gamble so far by any goalie in this season's playoffs.

Yes, there was luck, too, such as when Ron Francis' one-timer missed an open net, skittered along the goal line and deflected off the opposite post on a turning-point play that kept Detroit in the lead.

"Those are the things he can do, steal saves," Brendan Shanahan said Tuesday. "From playing against him over the years, he has an incredible presence. It's not too often when you have a meeting about the other team, and the first guy you start talking about is the goaltender."

That sounds like the meeting the Hurricanes had Tuesday as they tried

to figure out how to get to the goalie who shut them out for 127-plus minutes over two games.

The Hurricanes don't have a goal since Jeff O'Neill scored in the third period of their 3-2, three-overtime loss in Game 3, and they have only three goals in the last 12 periods.

"It's been tough," Cole said. "Hasek is out of his net quite a bit to play the puck ... he's out there throwing picks and moving the puck along. But it's part of the game, and we've got to find a way to fight through it."

Clearly, to keep from losing Game 5 and the series before what certainly will be a revved-up, ready-to-celebrate-the-Cup crowd in Joe Louis Arena, the Hurricanes must find a way to get the puck past Hasek. They have

gone into the third period of each of the first four games with a chance to win, yet have done so only once.

"We just have to go to Detroit and really play the best game of the series," defenseman Glen Wesley said. "And if we don't, obviously we're going to be coming back."

And he didn't mean with the Stanley Cup, either.

Red Wings captain Steve Yzerman and Hasek said the Red Wings want to wrap up the finals now, and not risk going back to Carolina for a Game 6 Saturday that could lead to a win-or-else Game 7.

"No doubt we want to close it out," Hasek said. "We want to finish it here, and we want to do anything we can to win."

Broncos' quarterback glad to have receivers

By John Marshall

The Associated Press
DENVER — Brian Griese complained that he had no one to give the ball to after injuries left the Denver Broncos thin at wide receiver and running back last season.

After a couple of key additions and some improving health, Griese is all smiles.

"It's been really nice," Griese said Tuesday on the second day of Denver's mini camp. "I feel like a kid in a candy store again."

Last season, Denver lost wideout Ed McCaffrey to a broken leg in the season opener against the Giants, then running back Terrell Davis suffered a knee injury that limited his playing time the rest of the season. Running back Olandis Gary also went down with a broken leg in November and wide receiver Rod Smith played most of the season with an injured ankle.

But this season, barring another string of injuries, the Broncos are primed to be one of the deepest offensive teams in the league.

McCaffrey has yet to run patterns against coverage, but has been running and cutting hard during other drills. Davis had arthroscopic surgery to clean out his knee two weeks ago, but has been running on the side and is expected to be back in time for training camp. Smith and Gary have shown no effects of their injuries during mini camp.

The Broncos also took steps in the

offseason to improve their depth in case someone does get hurt.

In April, Denver signed tight end Shannon Sharpe, who helped the Broncos win two Super Bowls, and two-time Pro Bowl receiver Rob Moore. The Broncos also used their first pick in the NFL draft — 19th overall — to select speedy receiver Ashley Lelie.

"It's been real nice to have Eddie, Rod and Shannon in the huddle at one time and think about the possibilities," Griese said.

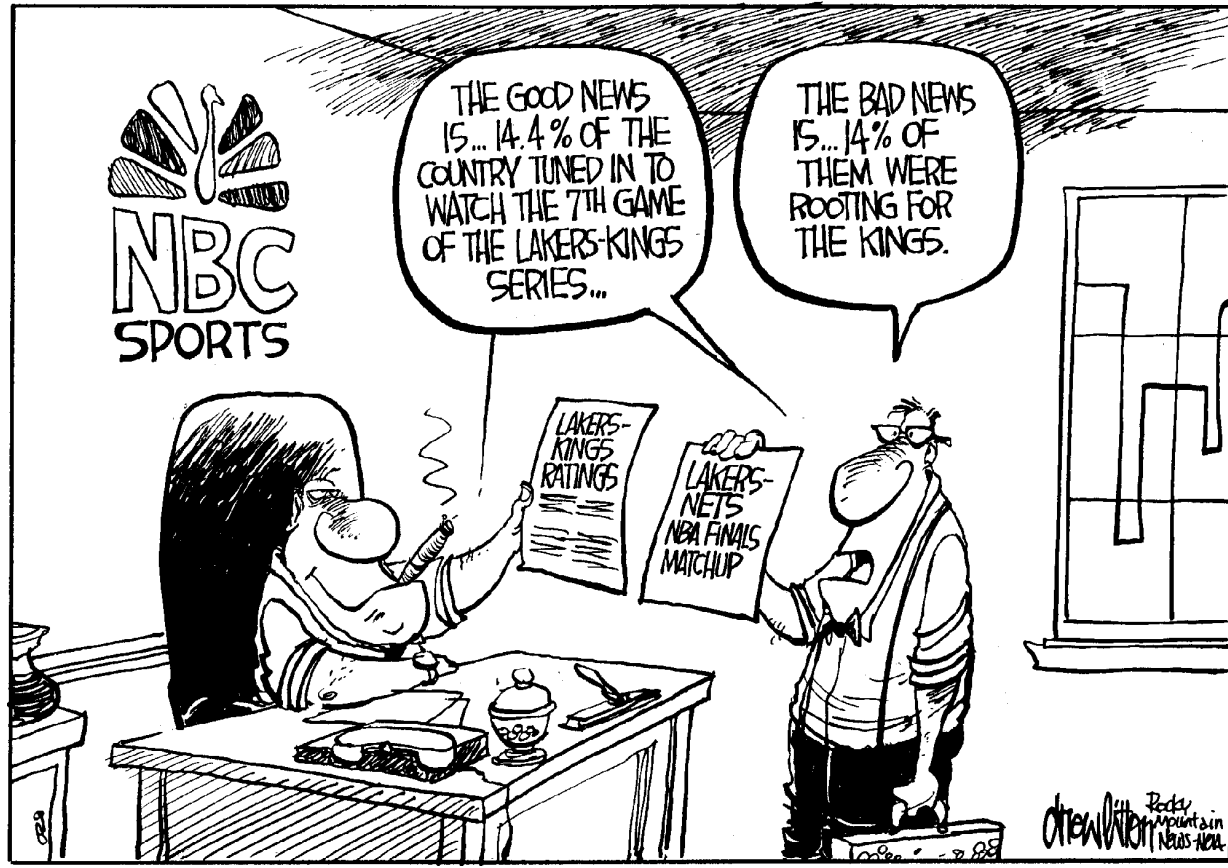
Griese said Sharpe's return could mean as much in the locker room as it does on the field.

Denver struggled to an 8-8 record a year ago, but having Sharpe back immediately gives the Broncos chemistry that may have been missing.

"It think it's going to help us a bunch because he likes to have fun in the locker room and keep morale up," Griese said. "You've got to have fun. We play this game because we love to play. We love the camaraderie and we love to have fun. When you lose sight of that, I think you're not as good a player."

While Sharpe will give the Broncos a boost in the locker room, Moore could be the best addition on the field.

Moore has struggled with injuries the past two seasons, prompting the Arizona Cardinals to release him after last season. He had arthroscopic surgery a week after signing with the Broncos in March, but has moved with ease during the mini camp.



Shaq and Lakers take on Nets tonight

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — Shaquille O'Neal remembers the night Houston fans banged brooms against his team bus following the last sweep in the NBA Finals. Seven years later, O'Neal considers it one of the four lowest moments of his life.

O'Neal can bring his own broom to Game 4 and use it on New Jersey if the Los Angeles Lakers finish this series in the Game 4 starting at 7 p.m. tonight.

The Lakers have a 3-0 lead over the Nets in the best-of-seven series and a Los Angeles win would mark just the

seventh sweep in Finals history and the first for the Lakers franchise. No team has ever been down three games in the NBA finals and come back to win it.

"There is not very far to go in this season," Lakers forward Fox said. "Just to the podium to accept our trophy. But we already see one more (championship) on the board."

A win over the Nets is seen as inevitable by many, and more attention is being paid to the Lakers-Nets matchup in the Western Conference finals than to the championship.

Since beating Sacramento, the Lakers have grown weary of remarks from the Kings and coach Rick Adelman that contend O'Neal received favorable treatment from the officials and imply the Kings are really the better team.

It's motivated the Lakers to end this series with New Jersey and start readying for next year.

"We're just looking forward to finishing the job here and then addressing all the comments next year," Fox said. "We understand the jealousy, but it's starting to upset us."

Unser to drive Pikes Peak, needs sponsor

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — Robby Unser is officially entered in the 80th Pikes Peak International Hill Climb, but he's not sure what he'll drive or who's going to pay for it.

"We have a couple of choices on cars," Unser said Tuesday from his New Mexico home, "but they depend on the sponsorship."

As the June 29 race approaches, Unser said he is looking for potential sponsors to step forward.

In his decade of competition at Pikes Peak, Unser, son of racing legend Bobby Unser Sr., has won eight division titles and the overall title in 1992.

His 1994 time of 10 minutes, 5.85 seconds in an open wheel racer is the third-fastest time ever recorded at Pikes Peak.

He last raced at Pikes Peak in 1997. He won hill climb titles in the now-defunct Open Rally class in 1987 and 1989.

Unser said he wants to compete exclusively in the Sports Car Club of America's ProRally division at Pikes Peak, hoping the exposure will lead to a permanent spot on the ProRally or WorldRally circuit.

The hill climb is run on a 12.42-mile stretch of the highway on the 14,110-foot-high mountain. The highway is surrounded by the Pike National Forest, closed to public use because of the extreme fire danger and an 87,000-acre wildfire burning west of Colorado Springs.

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