No appeal, yet, for Winterhawks; good luck, Abby Chin; a big honor for Karen Gaffney; and more notes

Knocking it about as we fly into another busy sports weekend (only 15 shopping days left until Christmas)...

• That appeal the Winterhawks were to have had Tuesday regarding the Western Hockey League’s heavy-handed sanctions — including an unprecedented and almost unimaginable $200,000 fine — against them for assorted violations? Never happened. Seems there was a conference call with members of the league’s board of governors, who turned down Portland’s request for an appeal because, after all, there is no formal appeal process in place.

Say what?
The WHL basically hands a death penalty to a franchise, and the Hawks have to lump it?

There is a board of governors meeting scheduled in early February, and Portland coach/general manager Mike Johnston — suspended for the remainder of the season — hopes to be on the agenda.

“It’s the commissioner’s responsibility to rule,” WHL commissioner Ron Robison told Yahoo Sports the other day, “but ultimately, the WHL governors can review those decisions.”

Meanwhile, I finally got Cory Flett — the league’s director of communications — to answer a phone call Thursday afternoon after leaving several messages with no reply. Asked why he had not returned my calls, Flett responded, “Did you read our press release? The WHL is making no further comments on the matter involving the Winterhawks. Thank you.”

Except Robison HAS made further comments, including interviews with a pair of Toronto radio stations and ostensibly with Yahoo Sports.

Such selective engagement with the media is both unprofessional and unbecoming of a body that has levied penalties that — as one wag notes — is akin to fining the New York Yankees $200 million.

Many questions should be addressed, among them:

• What is the next-greatest fine in WHL history? (I believe the answer is $5,000.)
• What are the WHL rules regarding flight expenses for parents? Other than for parents’ weekend, are they specifically addressed in the league handbook?
• Has there ever been a forensic audit of another WHL franchise like the one done on the Winterhawks?
• Why is there no appeal process?

I would sue. The Hawks have spoken to lawyers about the next step but would prefer not to do so. Their
thinking is, if you’re trying to work within the league, you can’t take them to court for damages. If only the league had shown the Hawks the same kind of respect.

• Abby Chin’s climb up the sportscasting ladder continues as she leaves her position as studio host at Comcast SportsNet Northwest at the end of the month for a similar post with Comcast SportsNet New England. Chin, who arrived in the Northwest in April 2011 after a three-year stint in Birmingham, Ala., is a star in the making. She won me over with her work ethic. Some day she’ll explain to me that extensive, multi-colored notes chart she puts together during every Trail Blazer game.

Good luck in blizzard country, Abby.

• No word yet on a decision from Safeway regarding sponsorship of the LPGA event with which it has served as a title sponsor for 17 years. Safeway officials are meeting this week at their annual board meeting, with Portland’s Safeway Classic as a major topic.

Tournament Golf, Inc., officials have requested a two-year commitment with a Safeway option for a third. It’s one of the premier annual events on the state’s sports calendar, one that has provided $18 million in charitable contributions through its 41-year history.

Here’s hoping Safeway will see fit to continue its long-standing support.

The best, incidentally, to TGI President Tom Maletis, recuperating this week following replacement of his left knee. You’ll be back out there hitting them long and straight before you know it, Tom. Wish I could say the same.

• Another honor for Portland’s Karen Gaffney, recently inducted into the city’s Catholic Youth Organization Hall of Fame (the other two members are Joey Harrington and Anna Maria Lopez). Gaffney has been nominated for World Open Water Swimmer of the Year, whose recipient “1) embodies the spirit of open water swimming, 2) possess the sense of adventure, tenacity and perseverance that open water swimmers are known for and 3) has most positively influenced the world of open water swimming during the year.”

Gaffney, 34, swam the English Channel as part of a six-person relay team in 2001 and has continued to complete challenging long-distance open water swims to raise funds and awareness of what people with Down Syndrome can accomplish.

The public can vote for Gaffney for World Open Water Swimmer of the Year at worldopenwaterswimmingassociation.com/2012-wowsa-woman-of-the-year-nominees/.

She is spearheading fundraising through the “Team Gaffney Challenge” to help finance the Providence Aquatic Therapy Program at the Center for Medically Fragile Children. Last summer, Gaffney swam six miles bridge to bridge in the Columbia River, raising $80,000 for the program.

For more information, call the Providence Child Center Foundation at 503 215-2471 or go to deanne.coppenger@providence.org.

• Harrington, incidentally, is the guest speaker for the National Football Foundation’s annual Scholar-Athlete banquet Wednesday at Jantzen Beach Red Lion. Master of ceremonies is Portland State coach Nigel Burton, while presenters are Oregon State assistant head coach Jay Locey, former NFL quarterback Neil Lomax and ex-Linfield coach Ad Rutschman.

Former Tigard and Tualatin coach Craig Hastin will be honored with the “Walk of Champions” award.

• Richelle Heacock is progressing slowly as she nears the third anniversary of the auto accident that left her paralyzed from the chest down in January 2010.

The former Clackamas Community College volleyball player, 23, lives with her parents in Ashford, Wash., and spent time camping with coach Kathie Woods and the Cougar players last summer.

“Richelle has different sensations here and there, but still no voluntary movement,” says Woods, who keeps in regular touch with her former player. “She works hard at acupuncture and during her rehab sessions and keeps a great attitude. She still feels that some day they’ll find a way to help her walk again.”

kerryeggers@portlandtribune.com

Twitter: @kerryeggers
No appeal, yet, for Winterhawks; good luck, Abby Chin…

A big honor for…