

HOCKEY

Frozen-Solid Fans

IN NOVEMBER 2004, PRO hockey was on the brink of disaster. The lockout that would eventually cancel the 2004-05 season was one month old, and as players and owners waited out the billion-dollar stare-down, the worst part was that no one seemed to notice. Across the country, in newspapers and on TV, the NHL simply wasn't missed.

Ted Leonsis, watching his \$85 million investment in the Washington Capitals melt away, knew he had to keep interest alive. But instead of courting traditional reporters, the owner and AOL executive turned to the Web—inviting the 25 most vocal commenters at Washingtoncaps.com to a private dinner at a D.C. restaurant. This month, as the NHL returns for its second post-lockout season, newspapers and TV shows are still cutting back on coverage, but the hockey blogosphere is exploding. While the Los Angeles Times announced recently that it would no longer send sportswriters on most road trips with the Kings and Ducks, hundreds of fan sites have launched. Puckheads say they no longer even bother to watch SportsCenter; instead, homemade highlight reels on YouTube have taken its place.

The league, still dwarfed by the NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball, is focusing on a smaller base of more-intense fans. Officials cite statistics that say hockey followers are the most tech savvy and most likely to consume content via new platforms like wireless devices, as compared with fans of other

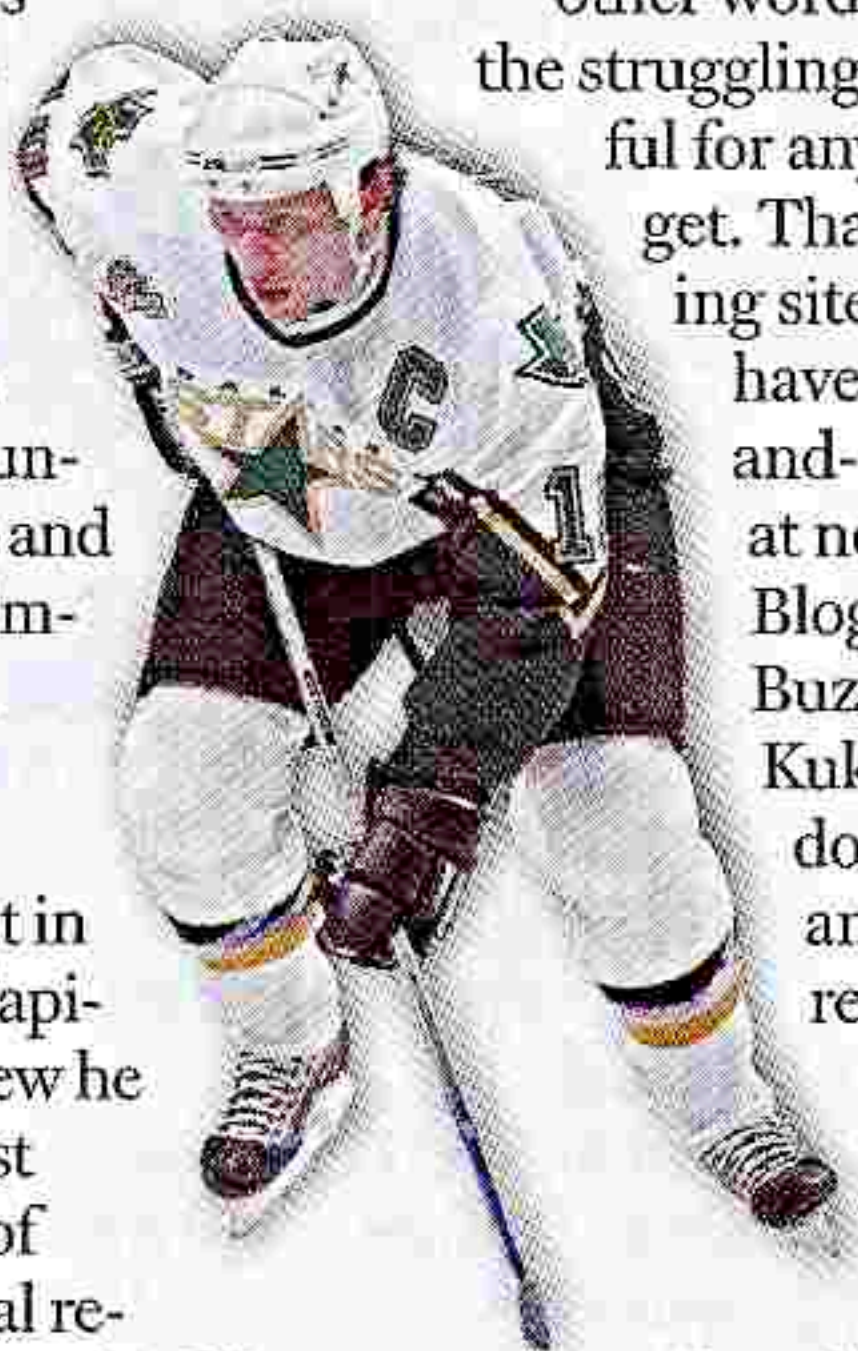
sports. "Our demographic is younger, and that's what they want," says Doug Perlman, the NHL's head of new media. "We went as viral as possible during our relaunch."

"Viral," of course, is another word for "cheap," and the struggling league is grateful for any attention it can get. That means embracing sites that it might have winged cease-and-desist letters at not too long ago. Blogs like Hockey-Buzz, OffWing and Kukla's Korner do an impressive amount of original reporting, but they also host videos that technically belong to someone else.

When they cause real sensations, however, the league

(N) Get links to some of the most popular hockey blogs at xtra.Newsweek.com

THIN ICE:
Betting on blogs



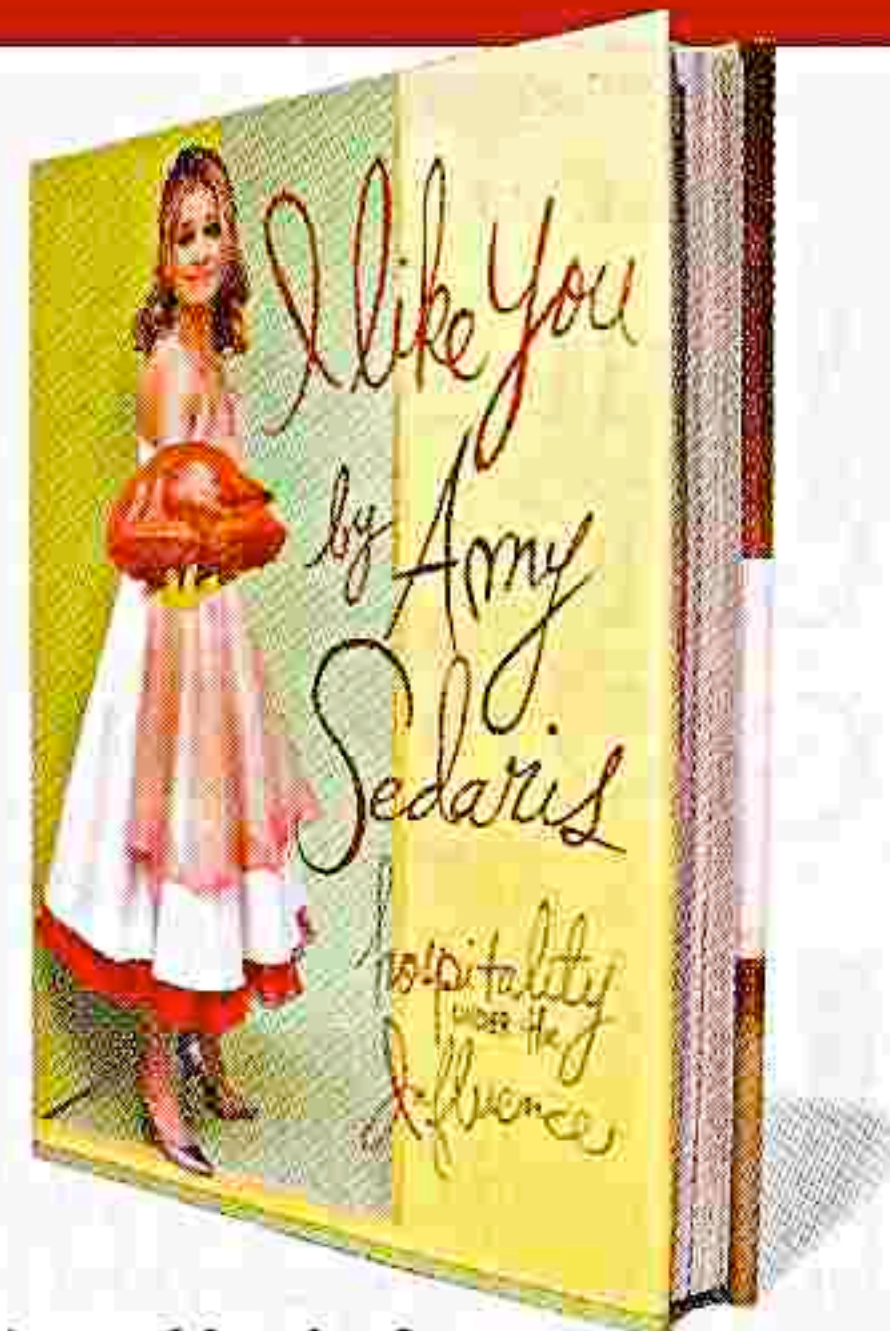
will look the other way. (One reel of jaw-droppers by rookie phenom Alexander Ovechkin, set to a thumping Chemical Brothers soundtrack, is referred to around league HQ as simply "the 'Boom' video.") And bloggers are only getting more important: in at least five stadiums, you'll find them credentialed for the press box, typing away next to their dwindling peers.

-NICK SUMMERS

PARTIES

How to Have Fun

AMY SEDARIS LIKES going to parties, but what she *loves* is throwing them. Sedaris, a comedienne, actress and now author of "I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence," wants to share her excitement for throwing a bash with panache—and not of the Martha Stewart variety. Part scrapbook, with supersaturated color photos like the ones found



in cookbooks from the 1960s, and part how-to with myriad arts and crafts ideas, "I Like You" is as kitschy, cool and hilarious as its author. Sedaris's tips can be subversive: "Try filling your medicine cabinet with marbles. Nothing announces a nosy partygoer more successfully than an avalanche of marbles striking a porcelain sink." But she can be homey, too. The very night she talked to NEWSWEEK she was making dinner for friends. The menu? Meatloaf, potatoes and green beans. "And I have cupcakes." Just look out for the marbles served on the side.

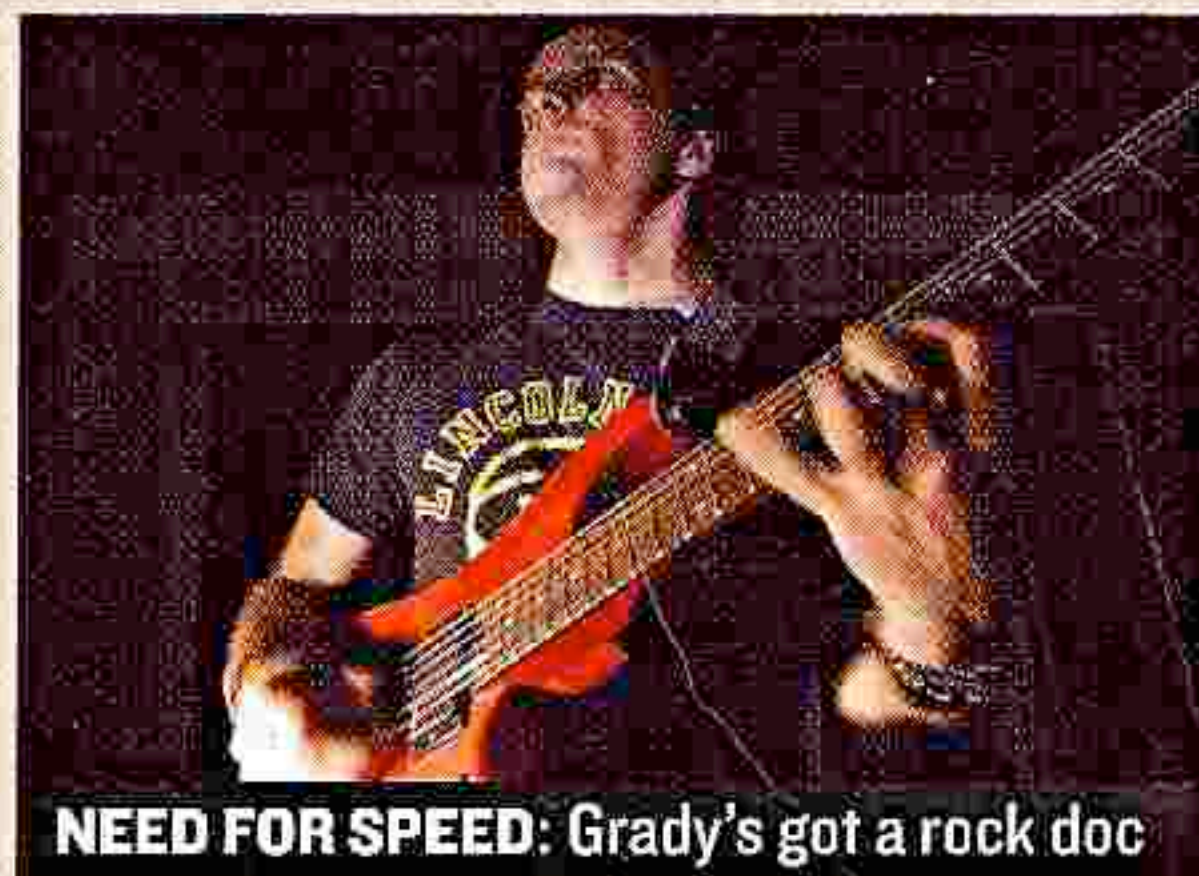
-JAC CHEBATORIS

TECHNIQUE Secrets of 'Shredding'

When former Guns N' Roses guitarist Slash rips into a blistering solo, he's not focusing on the details. "How I pick and how I finger—it's really hard for me to concentrate on either one of those things," he says. "I'm basically just trying to find the notes that I hear in my head." But even if Slash and other pros aren't fully conscious of how they play blindingly fast, clean licks—or "shred," in guitarspeak—novices are eager to find out. So Brooklyn guitarist Troy Grady is producing "Cracking the Code," a documentary of his search for the secrets of shredding. The Yale grad bought a \$2,500 slow-motion camera and has filmed some of the fastest players

around the country (including Houston-based great Rusty Cooley) at 120 frames per second, seeking "idiosyncratic right-hand motions." Guitarists will recognize some familiar tips: to help synchronize right and left hands and to play sequences with even numbers of notes, which will keep pick direction the same

each time around (this facilitates muscle memory). For odd-numbered riffs—which make changing strings more challenging—Grady, a shredder himself, says he's observed a picking motion he terms "scooping": a "semiconscious," efficient way of crossing strings (he's saving a fuller explanation for the film).



NEED FOR SPEED: Grady's got a rock doc

Grady seeks a "unified guitar theory"—a proven set of best practices. If he succeeds, he could help produce the thing that's eluded wanna-be Jimi Hendrixes for decades—a primer for rocking!

-JONATHAN MUMMOLO