



Chiefs owner brings in Roustan to manage ECHL franchise

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— Johnstown Chiefs majority owner Neil Smith will count on internationally renowned Roustan United Arena Solutions Team to manage the ECHL franchise.

The former New York Rangers' Stanley Cup-winning GM said the agreement potentially could lead to Roustan purchasing the Chiefs.

“We’ve entered into an agreement with Roustan’s company to help manage the club, not the hockey on the ice, but the business side of things,” Smith said Tuesday night, when reached in New York.

Roustan United works with arenas worldwide but also has a strong presence in Johnstown. Roustan United maintains Planet Ice Skating Center in Richland Township, according to the rink’s Web site. Roustan United lists an office address at 195 Jari Drive, the site of Planet Ice.

“Graeme Roustan and I are friends,” Smith said of the CEO of Roustan Capital and chairman of Roustan United Arena Solutions. “He’s got a big company here in Johnstown. It seemed like a natural. It’s in the same business. He’s the CEO of Bauer as well.”

Graeme Roustan made international news in February by purchasing Nike Inc. hockey brand Bauer for \$200 million.

Smith said Roustan United will replace two Chiefs staff members who recently left for other jobs. Vice President of Business Operations Kevin McGeehan resigned last month to accept a position in the pharmaceutical field.

Director of Business Operations Doug Nelson said last week that he will join the NBA’s Cleveland Cavaliers.

“Kevin did a great job and was there a long time,” Smith said. “I’m real happy for him and his family that he gets to do something that is a step up the ladder for him. Doug did a great job too. I just got lucky that I have been involved with these people.”

Smith, who has been part of the Chiefs ownership since 2002, said he’d consider selling the Chiefs to Roustan, but such a scenario probably would hinge on the outcome of a Texas-based consulting group’s ongoing evaluation of Cambria County War Memorial Arena.

The Bassewitz Group will be paid \$37,500 by the county and Greater Johnstown Partnerships to find ways to improve the facility’s finances and enhance its impact on the local economy.

“There is the potential that they could end up buying it from me, which I’ve always said would be the best thing, if local owners had it,” Smith said. “For now, we just want to see if we can make it go in Johnstown.

“I’m not involved in that part of it, but I think the county is being very cooperative in trying to do a study to find out whether or not there is a better way to run this whole thing at the War Memorial,” Smith said. “Roustan owns Planet Ice, so maybe there is a way to make everything work together. The big thing is they’re all local people.”

Smith said he’s been impressed by both Graeme Roustan, a Montreal native, and Scott Branovan, president and chief executive of Roustan United Arena Solutions.

“I think that they’re really good people. It makes it a lot brighter for the future of the Chiefs,” he said. “They have a sincere interest in the town and the area. I truly do believe they’ll make it work.”

As for the long-term and a potential sale, Smith will wait for the outcome of the arena study.

“We should know something by September on that front, with the study of the building and the team,” Smith said. “As far as my agreement with the Roustan company, that’s going to be status quo. It takes the heat off of me in terms of somehow finding a way to replace Kevin. That would be tough for me to do from New York. I’m involved to steer the ship, particularly in the hockey operation. I’m involved in all the decisions that go on.”

Representatives from Roustan or the county could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

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