

RANGERS GET READY

By **NICK PARISH**

While some of their teammates continued to play in Italy, the Rangers skated yesterday in a practice focused on conditioning.

A dozen Blueshirts worked in the hour-long skate followed by dry land training in a situation Tom Renney says is less like a training camp and more like a tune-up.

"The big thing here is to make sure we continue to elevate the level of fitness back to where it at least was and maybe even surpass that," Renney said.

Rangers are on all four national teams still in Torino. Renney expects the latest arrivals to be back home by Tuesday, but their readiness for next Thursday's matchup with Philadelphia will be questionable. The Olympians will have played eight games more than their NHL teammates; the mix of game fatigue and travel back to New York might leave them wiped.

"There's nothing like game shape, obviously," Renney said about his rested group. "But certainly from a stamina perspective and an ability to move forward real healthy and ready to go, we're going to push the envelope here."

Not part of the "real healthy" group yet are Blair Betts and Petr Prucha — Betts with a strained left MCL, Prucha with a strained right, though both appear to be doing better. Prucha rode the stationary bike and Betts skated after the main group with assistant coach Perry Pearn.

Neither will progress until head trainer Jim Ramsay returns from his duties with Team Canada, but Renney says Betts is close to skating with the team.

"I watched Blair skate a couple of days ago and I emailed Ramsay right away and said, 'Gee, he looks great,' " Renney said. "Based on what I saw, he's not too far away. Obviously [Ramsay] emails back, as the medical guy, and says 'Whoa coach.' But he's coming along nicely."

Of Prucha, Renney said, "At the tail end of the week we'd like to see if he can get on the ice and show us what he's got. I'd like to see him at the conclusion of this week."

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Renney didn't swoon when he saw Finland's Jarkko Ruutu smash a bent-over Jaromir Jagr into the boards last week.

"Bottom line is, our guy was hurt," Renney said. "But I could honestly tell you not for a second did I think it would be a real problem."

He did get a kick out of 5-9 Martin Straka leaping to his teammate's aid, jumping onto the 6-2 Ruutu.

"I thought that was outstanding, I thought that was just great," Renney said. "That's great to see."

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