

Sale of Canadiens may be close: report

Montreal native Roustan considered a front-runner for historic club

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Montreal Canadiens owner George Gillett bought the club in 2001. ((Paul Chiasson/Canadian Press))

CBC Sports insider Scott Morrison says a deal to sell the Montreal Canadiens may be close.

Majority owner George Gillett has received as many as 10 serious offers for the famous team over the past few weeks and that group has been narrowed to two, Morrison said on Saturday during *Hockey Night in Canada's* Hot Stove segment.

"There has been a lot of activity in the last 48 hours, and speculation is that if not done, a deal for the sale of the Habs is very, very close," Morrison said.

One name near the top of the list seems to be that of W. Graeme Roustan, a Montreal native who runs a capital fund, Roustan Inc., is the chair of equipment firm Bauer Hockey, and has an arena building and management company, Roustanunited.

"He is very, very keen to buy the Canadiens," Morrison said.

Also in the running is the Quebec Pension Fund (Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec), a group headed by Hall of Fame defenceman and former Habs' general manager and player Serge Savard, and at least seven others.

Savard's group seems to have a lot of local support.

"The fans in Montreal want, by an 87 per cent [margin] in the polls, Serge Savard," said *Hockey Night* insider Al Strachan, who added that group is serious and well funded.

"And it probably would be the best thing really, because if you look at teams in hockey, if you've got a hockey guy at the top, then you are probably going to be better off."

Speculation aside, there has not been any official word from Gillett he is interested in divesting himself of his 81-per-cent share in hockey's most famous franchise and one celebrating its 100th season. Molson owns the remaining 19 per cent.

Montreal is among the league's most successful clubs financially. In October, Forbes valued the team at \$334 million US, the third highest in the NHL behind the Toronto Maple Leafs (\$448 million) and New York Rangers (\$411 million).

Gillett bought the club and its Bell Centre home arena for \$181 million US in 2001 with the help of \$140 million in loans from two banks and the Quebec pension fund manager.

Morrison cautioned that until Gillett makes an official announcement, all remains up in the air.

"All is moot as far as where the price is going to go and what the cost of the franchise is going to be," he said.

The Canadiens qualified for the playoffs on Thursday night and will play the Boston Bruins in the first round.