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## Campbell says referee 'couldn't cut it' in NHL

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NHL vice-president Colin Campbell says former on-ice official Dean Warren was fired in 2008 for one reason: "He couldn't cut it as a referee."

In his first public comments on Warren's high-profile battle to get reinstated as an NHL referee through the Ontario Labour Relations Board, Campbell told the *Star* there is no truth to allegations Warren was targeted for his advocacy work as an executive with the officials' union.

"It's shocking to me that that is his allegation," Campbell, NHL director of hockey operations, said in an interview.

"We decided Dean Warren couldn't make it. We lived with him as long as we could. But we have to listen to the concerns of the hockey world."

In fresh allegations levied against the league on Monday, Warren's lawyer, Tom Curry, said the NHL has banned him and his client from visiting officials' dressing rooms after games to speak about their impending testimony before the hearing.

"Effective a few days ago, Mr. Warren is being told he is not welcome there. ... It is obviously having a chilling effect on these referees."

Curry and Warren were planning to visit with veteran referee Kerry Fraser following a game he officiated in Toronto last week.

Fraser, who is scheduled to testify in support of Warren on Friday, confirmed he was advised by league security not to allow Warren or Curry into the officials' dressing room for a post-game visit.

Curry called it an offence to tamper with labour board witnesses.

Board hearing chair Brian McLean did not allow discussion on the issue Monday, insisting the two sides consult before proceeding with questions.

Other NHL referees scheduled to appear before the hearing in support of Warren include Dan Marouelli, Bill McCreary, Mike Leggo and Pat Dapuzzo.

Warren's argument for reinstatement hinges on a string of generally laudatory league performance reviews and playoff assignments he says placed him in the upper echelon of the NHL's officiating staff until 2006, the year he was elected to the executive of the National Hockey League Officials' Association.

Warren performance reviews written by Terry Gregson, the league's current director of officiating, in 2005 and 2006 note the referee's awkward skating style but also say he "definitely gets to proper positioning" and "covers the ice well."

Other reviews cited in the hearing refer to Warren as meeting a "very solid NHL standard," having "solid judgment throughout" and showing "hustle/drive enthusiasm/jump."

In testimony Monday, Gregson said Warren "wasn't competing at the level he should have been" in the 2007-08 season, Warren's last in the league.

But showed more than a dozen game clips in which the league had questioned Warren's calls, Gregson generally agreed with specific decisions or characterized the incidents as judgement calls. Campbell, meanwhile, said NHL hockey operations staff were developing "sweaty palms" watching Warren work toward the end of his career.

Asked about the complimentary job reviews that proceeded Warren's firing, Campbell said the NHL tries to focus on the positive rather than try to "tear down" officials.

"There are lots of times we don't tell them they're awful. You live with the occasional bad night."

Behind the scenes, Campbell was more candid about his criticism of Warren prior to his firing.

In a series of emails Campbell sent to his head of officiating in 2006 and 2007, he wrote, "Warren has to go. ... There must be a way to get rid of this guy."

One message Campbell wrote in September 2007 to the league's then officiating director Stephen Walkom asks: "Can we use this sh-- to remove him or is there an HR (human resources) excuse?"

Campbell said Monday his messages raised candid concerns about the official's abilities.

"Our issue is we need the best referees on the ice. We're not inhumane. We've invested a lot in these guys."

Campbell said he's never discussed union activities involving Warren and Warren's role with the union was not an issue in the firing.

"We have our feel about referees. We have our comments and we weigh in on who moves onto the playoffs. We don't twist the arms of (officiating directors)."

Asked what the NHL will do if Warren wins his appeal to have his job back, Campbell said they'd need to assess any such ruling.

"We've got a responsibility to players and fans and this was our decision. We don't feel he's capable of doing NHL games."

The hearing continues Thursday.