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## **Cooper spotlight shifts to Arkansas**

By LOU WILIN

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With unionized Cooper Tire workers in Findlay locked out and negotiations unofficially suspended, the spotlight moves to Cooper's plant in Texarkana, Ark.

Negotiators there are talking, and unionized workers are still working.

Cooper Tire's contract with its 1,400 unionized Texarkana workers expires Jan. 20. Cooper's Findlay and Texarkana plants are its only unionized factories. Its other U.S. plant is in Tupelo, Miss.

The Texarkana workers' union chief sounded less tense Friday than his Findlay counterpart has in recent weeks. But United Steelworkers Local 752 President David Boone was cautious.

"Right now (negotiations are going) real slow. There's not a lot of movement," he said.

Boone said talks are still in the early stages.

"I will have a better idea of how it's going by the middle of next week," he said.

Talks between labor and management for the Texarkana plant began Nov. 27, the day 1,050 unionized workers in Findlay rejected a Cooper labor proposal. Union workers in Findlay were locked out by the company the next day, Nov. 28.

Company representatives have alleged that Findlay union leaders tried to gain leverage over Cooper by delaying their talks so they would overlap with Texarkana negotiations. A work stoppage at both plants would have put Cooper at risk of losing customers, the company said.

Findlay union leaders said they and unionized workers never intended to strike and they did not delay talks.

But Cooper Tire leaders remained unconvinced, and they locked out the unionized workers in Findlay, employing temporary workers instead.

The company weeks ago said talks in Findlay were at an impasse. The union disputes that. But the two sides have not spoken in more than three weeks, and no date has been set to resume talks.

So it appears all the Findlay rank and file can do is sit and watch Texarkana.

"It may be that what happens in Texarkana may become a repeat in Findlay," said William E. Hannum III, managing partner for Schwartz Hannum of Andover, Mass., which represents companies in labor negotiations. "If they get a deal in Texarkana, (then Findlay) will be hard-pressed to say, 'No we shouldn't.'"

That's the way it frequently works in labor deals with auto manufacturers, for example.

"Frequently a deal in one place becomes a template for the other," he said. "It's a pretty common pattern."

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