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Business Office**

25 Queen St. N.
Bolton ON L7E 1C1
(shared with
Caledon Citizen)
905-939-8934
905-857-6626
Fax: 905-857-6363
E-mail address
admin@kingsentinel.com
web site
www.kingsentinel.com

Head Office

34 Main St. W.
Beeton ON L0G 1A0
905-729-2287
Fax: 905-729-2541

Publishers:

BRUCE HAIRE
JOHN ARCHIBALD

Editorial

Managing Editor

Bruce Haire

News Editor

Bill Rea

E-mail address

editor@kingsentinel.com

Advertising

Director of Sales

John Archibald

Sales Reps

Nancy Stenhouse

Aileen Robbins

David Halwig

Annette Derraugh

Diann Gaston

Composing

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Judi Burkitt

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Business

Anne Archibald

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Cheryl Phillips

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**Bill's
Bulletin
Board**

By Bill Rea

I had a hard time last week coming to terms with the negative coverage that the NobleKing Minor Hockey Association had to endure with the peewee local league series with Thornton.

There were a couple of stories in the Toronto Sun last week; stories I read with little pleasure.

Now I'm a big boy and I'm old enough to understand that rules are rules and that rules are made for a reason. It's the same case with the laws of the land.

They are there for a reason too, but we also know that there are courts and judges, and they are charged with looking at cases in which laws have been violated, finding out why and assessing appropriate actions in response. We sort of take it for granted that judges are going to show wisdom, and in case of rule infractions in minor hockey, we hope that the people in charge will use wisdom too. Judges and courts have to decide what's best for society and what's best for the people involved. People in charge of minor hockey have a somewhat simpler task. They are supposed to decide what's best for the kids.

I hope that was the case in this situation.

It's hard for me to be critical of adults who give of their time to coach aspiring young athletes, no mat-

ter where they operate. The same goes for those who administer the associations that run these programs. In a way, I'm a little envious. I couldn't coach a bunch of kids on the best day I ever had. I have neither the skills, the knowledge, the certification or the temperament for the job.

But I'm tired of thinking about that. Besides, I've been thinking a lot about a man named Ron over the last week.

Ron was one of the coaches around the arena in the west end of Toronto where I played my house league hockey as a boy. He was the assistant coach of my team one of my tyke years (I went through the system some years before they invented such levels as novice or minor peewee). He was going to be my assistant coach in my atom year, but the head coach died early in the season and Ron was obliged to take the helm.

We were his "Tigers," a word we heard a lot in the dressing room and on the bench.

I have seen very few adults in my time with as much enthusiasm as Ron had packed into him. When our team scored, he jumped for joy. When we were scored against, we were told to bear down and get the goal back. And if someone pulled a boner on the ice, once back on the

bench, he received a pat on the back and words to the effect of, "Put it behind you and make it up on the next shift."

He always made sure his players felt good about themselves. He went around to each of them after every game; victory, defeat or tie. Each player got a pat on the back or shoulder, or sometimes a hug (those were the days when coaches could do things like that without raising eyebrows or suspicions). Every player was thanked for his efforts that day (those were also the days before girls played organized hockey).

My teams made it to the finals both years Ron was behind the bench. In the tyke year, we won the championship with no sweat. Ron was enthused and positive after the game. The atom year, the final series went to the distance, and we were blown out in the last game, something like 7-0. Ron was subdued and positive after the game. I don't think that guy could have had a negative thought if he tried.

But he could be serious too, and I well remember the day he set out the rules of behaviour in his dressing room - not for the players, but for the parents. No kid was to be criticized in the dressing room for his play. And no kid was to be lavished with excessive praise, although I think the man did have an appropriate appreciation for parental parochialism. And if parents had a problem with the way he was running things, they were free to air their beefs, just as long as the players couldn't hear it.

My peewee year was a big one for me, even if Ron was coaching another team. That was the year I scored

my first and only goal in my seven years of house-league hockey. There is a very good reason why NHL scouts never committed the correct spelling of my name to memory. Actually, I was owed a goal in that game. In the early going, I lobbed a shot from just inside the blue line that got by the goal tender, but not the goal post. I made up for it on my next shift, with a blind backhander in the heat of a major goal-mouth scramble that beat the goalie clean.

I came out of the dressing room after that match feeling high as a cloud. I had just spotted my mother at the end at the hall, wearing the appropriate look of maternal pride on her clock. And then I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Ron, bearing his usual big grin.

"I always knew you were going to have a game like that!" he said. "Way to go!"

My hockey playing days ended, with good reason, after my minor bantam year, and it was a good 10 years before I set foot in that arena again.

During the intervening years, I saw Ron one more time. He was browsing in the Canadian Tire store in Mississauga where I was working, mainly because my father was part owner of the franchise. He remembered me, of course, and tried to strike up conversation. But alas, I was in my early teens, at a stage of my life when small talk like that came with great difficulty.

Pity. That was the last time I saw this man who I liked so much, and our final conversation was conducted by the blithering adolescent who was myself. Ron deserved better from me.

I have no idea where Ron is today, although I

hope he is still coaching. The man had what it takes.

About 10 years ago, I found myself covering the house league hockey scene at an arena in East York. There was a fellow named Bernie, who was sort of a jack-of-all-trades in the organization, and his enthusiasm for working with kids matched, if not exceeded, Ron's. He ran the hockey school there, where all the aspiring Wayne Gretzkys got their first lessons in trying to skate backwards, among other skills a hockey player has to pick up eventually. I watched this show a couple of times, and could never tell for sure who was having the most fun; Bernie or the kids in his charge.

Bernie's son coached in that association too, and if enthusiasm is hereditary, then these two guys would make a terrific case study. The son (I forget his name) didn't jump for joy like Ron when his team scored, but he had a little dance he did, projecting comparable emotions.

Bernie and I were watching him one Saturday morning, when his team piled up the goals, meaning Bernie's son spent most of the game dancing. Our conversation gravitated to coaching and coaching styles. I told him about Ron, relating basically the same anecdotes I've just shared with you. Bernie nodded and smiled knowingly.

"You see?" he said when I had finished. "That's the coach you remember!"

Like I stated before, I've been thinking about Ron a lot over the last week. I would hope people running minor hockey associations, wherever they may be, would follow examples like his.

Editorial

**Township staff deserves praise
for getting budget down**

Granting the premise that none of us particularly enjoys paying taxes, we do have to accept the fact that like death, they are a reality.

Given that, we all want the taxes we pay to be as low as possible.

So King Township staffers deserve praise for sharpening their pencils and getting the proposed tax increase down from previously contemplated levels.

King's 2007 budget is

still a work in progress, and we are a couple of weeks away from seeing anything finalized. But things are looking a lot better than they did two months ago.

Early in February, staff presented a proposal that called for a 5.99 per cent tax increase. That was certainly a lot more appealing than the possibility of a 31 per cent hike that had been mentioned a couple of weeks before. In fairness, no

one ever seriously suggested an increase on that order. Staff had simply presented a list of desirable projects, including substantial road work to be carried out concurrently with the installation of sewers in King City and Nobleton, along with what it would cost if council opted to pay the whole shot without borrowing. The bare facts were given to council, and they directed their attention to financing that work

through debentures.

And councillors are now looking at setting up a reserve fund to help pay off those debentures when the bills start coming due, and that actually has raised the proposed tax hike that staff presented last week.

No matter, at 3.5 per cent, things have certainly improved a lot in the last two months.

And as we stated above, this budget is still a work in

progress, meaning there is time for the news to get better.

Still, there's a good lesson to be remembered here. There are some who might look at early projected tax increases and, for want of a better term, freak. We all have to remember that councillors and staff need to get all the projects and associated numbers on the table. That's when the decision making really starts.