

NORTH BAY TAXPAYERS' ASSOCIATION

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Beware City Hall Bench-Warmers

To the Editor

Knowing of my involvement with the North Bay Taxpayers Association, a friend was puzzled by my attendance at North Bay Battalion junior hockey games.

“Isn’t your group *against* the Battalion?” he wondered.

I assured him that the NBTA beef isn’t with the tenacious 20-year-olds who have brought the loudest sports buzz into the city in years.

Our grassroots group of civic watchdogs doesn’t blame the Battalion for the \$5-million overrun on the cost of refurbishing the 60-year-old Memorial Gardens. That would be like holding doctors and nurses responsible for heavy patient populations at the local hospital.

No, I assured him, the team that North Bay residents need to be worried about is not the junior hockey lineup, but the gang warming the bench in city council chambers.

The Battalion have skilled forwards like Nick Paul, who can dippy-doodle his way around the toughest defenders in the Ontario Hockey League. Mayor Al McDonald, on the other hand, spends too much time stickhandling around answers to tough questions, like: How was it possible on his watch for the arena renovation to go so far over budget with so little oversight? What happened to the chief operating officer’s comprehensive analysis of municipal operations that we were told would be tabled last fall? When are taxpayers going to get the details of the Public Works audit to explain thousands of litres of missing fuel and abuse of city-owned vehicle driving privileges?

The Battalion can usually rely on solid goaltending from Jake Smith as a last resort to stop opposition attacks. But city council can’t seem to count on any of their 600 employees - even the 101 of them who made the province’s \$100,000-a-year “sunshine” list - to back them up and shed light on why projects like the Lakeshore Drive reconstruction can drag on for months after promised completion dates.

When they’re naughty on the ice, Battalion skaters can expect to face the consequences. Rushing defenceman Brenden Miller served 97 minutes in penalties, but was still a plus-14 player in the regular season. Members of Team McDonald, on the other hand, don’t face any consequences when their game plans go awry, costing their “fans” millions.

Battalion coach Stan Butler knows what to do when any of his players aren’t performing up to expectations. So will North Bay voters.

Maurice Switzer
Battalion Season Ticket-holder