

SMILEY ON SPORTS

Raw deal for North

Wayne North, owner of the Kelowna Buckaroos of the B.C. Junior Hockey League, is in much the same position as comedian Rodney Dangerfield, neither of them gets any respect.

Both men are successful in their respective careers, Dangerfield for making people laugh and North for icing a winning and financially sound junior A tier 2 hockey team. However, the people of Kelowna and-or Kelowna city council have turned their back on North, in this, the most desperate time of his hockey career.

WHL FRANCHISE

Kelowna has been awarded a Western Hockey League, Junior A tier 1 franchise, not under the leadership of North, simply because he thinks it won't work in Kelowna, but under the guidance of Chris Parker, owner of the Penticton Knights, defending BCJHL champions.

Because of Parker's actions, his team has been suspended by the BCJHL and he has been ordered to sell the club by the end of the month. Also because of Parker's actions, the Buckaroos' home schedule has been reduced first to 22 home games from the proper 30, and now reduced again to 14. The move was made since WHL officials wouldn't allow Parker a franchise unless he could guarantee 30 home games, thus the Buckaroos had to suffer.

City council makes decisions concerning ice time, and in this instance gave North a raw deal. City council expects him to play his other 16 home games at the nearby Rutland Sports Complex, a much smaller facility than Kelowna's Memorial Arena, and a sure bet for North to lose money.

I don't think there's any doubt tier one is a better brand of hockey compared to tier two, but can it survive in Kelowna? That question won't be answered for several months and during that time everybody and his dog will be second guessing Parker and Kelowna city council for bringing tier one to Kelowna.

All indications are it probably won't survive. Kelowna's Memorial Arena is 1,000 seats smaller than any other WHL arena, and tier one hockey in B.C. doesn't enjoy tremendous fan support.

MORE EXPENSIVE

Plus the tier one team is charging \$2 more a head to get into the games. Whether tier one is \$2 better per game is debatable. Personally, I'd rather watch tier one hockey, but then again I don't like to see any hockey team die, and that's exactly what is going to happen in Kelowna. Either the Buckaroos will fade away or the tier one team will disappear. Right now it looks like the Buckaroos are on the ropes, since North said he won't keep his team running if he's only allowed 14 games in the Memorial Arena, and who can blame him.

Here's a guy who's worked hard to build a winner for a city which really doesn't care, one way or the other, what happens to him.

If North does take his team and fold it, it would leave a rather large hole in the Interior Division of the BCJHL. Kelowna has been the only team able to compete with Penticton Knights and without Buckaroos to play, Penticton could walk away with another title, providing Knights are still in the league.

SOAP OPERA

The whole situation reads much like a daytime soap opera, except in this case the actors are real and someone is going to get hurt, financially and emotionally, and it looks like it might be North.

I can't imagine Parker pulling his team out of the WHL midway through the season because of poor fan support, since Parker and his backers are financially secure. Therefore, the WHL is in Kelowna for a while. In that case it's going to be the Buckaroos which have to suffer, and that's too bad.

It sort of makes a person wonder how loyal fans really are. Why spend thousands of dollars, devote all your time to pleasing the fan with a winning team, when all that fan is going to do is turn his back on all your hard work.