

BROCK'S BANTER: The Power of Positive Sparring

By Brock Weir

There's something to be said about going first. There's also something to be said about going last. It's being in the middle, the sandwich filler, if you will, that is a little less clear.

But, then again, we all know there is a certain special kind of dread that comes with going first or last. You're either a pioneering trailblazer, or a Johnny-Come-Lately who is left with no fertile ground left to plough.

Personally speaking, growing up, going first or last always filled me with dread.

I wasn't a bold kid unless it was absolutely necessary. I wasn't one to speak up in class, for instance, if there wasn't anything particularly valuable to say. You didn't want to go into a class discussion cold, setting the tone for the talk, instead of having a moment or two to read the room. I never wanted to be first to arrive in class, lest people think I was a so-called brownnoser. Nor did I want to be the last guy to get his butt through the door because, in the end, you'd be called out for it.

Being first or last to arrive in class, however, was something you basically had control over.

Then there were those times where being first or last was completely out of your hands.

Everyone knows the gym class routine. When team sports were in the offing, two or four kids were generally chosen to be the team leaders tasked with forming their squads. More often than not, selection was based on the degree of friendship you shared with the respective team captain, or even one's elusive 'cool' factor.

As the quiet, awkward, fat kid, I was almost invariably picked last, and I was resigned to it. I never had to experience the anxiety of going first or face the expectations that come along with it, nor did I have to feel the butterflies flying around my gut dreading the shame of being the last one left on the vine. It was inevitable, I rolled with it, and it became something of a tradition.

So, in a debate format, such as what a couple of hundred Aurora residents witnessed at Town Hall on Sunday afternoon, I spared some thoughts for the candidates that had to go first or last.

Those first Council candidates out of the gate had the responsibility of doing their best to set the tone for the discussions that followed. The middle of the pack candidates each had their moments to change the conversation. Then, the last candidate to speak, had the dubious honour of closing things out, sealing the deal. This can often be a thankless task, but one which affords them the opportunity to see where their fellow candidates fell short and fill in the gaps themselves.

The same can be said of our Mayoral candidates. The first one had the opportunity to state his platform, watch the crowd, see what resonated with the sea of potential voters, perhaps fine-tuning as things went along.

So, in some respects, I felt for incumbent Geoff Dawe when he was lobbed the perennial question, 'Are you able to say something complimentary about one of your opponents' platforms?'

It is a question these candidates face on a regular basis every four years, and it is a question that they should have been prepared for. Each of the four candidates vying to be Aurora's mayor for the next four years know each other fairly well, each working with each other for at least a few years on Council - the one exception being candidates Chris Ballard and Tom Mrakas, whose respective times on Council did not intersect.

It was puzzling, however, that Mr. Dawe stumbled out of the gate with this very simple question.

'I have to admit I am not entirely 100 per cent familiar with all of my competitors' platforms, so that would be somewhat of a challenge to do that,' he said as the first candidate given a chance to respond. 'I do think Councillor Abel is a heck of a good guitar player. Councillor Mrakas is a really good basketball player; it's because he's tall. I am not sure what special talents Chris has. He's a good speaker.'

John Abel took the ball.

'Mr. Ballard is a good speaker,' said Mr. Abel. 'I think we all share a passion for our Town and our community and I think we should also recognize all the candidates here at the table that came here today and put their names forward. We don't do it for the money; we do it because we really care and I think it shows in all the work that we do. As for platforms, I am trying to think about something nice after the last series [of questions] and I am not there yet. I think we all want to be fiscally responsible and I just think we have a different interpretation about how we go about that. I can't really say anything more positive than that.'

But the positivity was building. Next up was Tom Mrakas.

'I think that every single one of us sitting around this table do have a passion for this Town,' he said. 'I think we all are looking to do what we believe is in the best interest of the community and, I think, at the end of the day, I respect each and every one of them for their opinions, even though I might not agree with them in how they go about it, but we all have the best interests of this Town at

heard.?

It was left to Chris Ballard to close.

?I like the fact that we all agree with each other that all candidates share a real passion for this Town and that it's very important. I think if I were to highlight a campaign, it would be John Abel's focus on fiscal responsibility and on planning. We share that. How we go about it, I think, is different. But we certainly share that. I agree with John that we need to do a much better job when it comes to spending your money.?

Positivity snowballed with each passing candidate, which was a nice change of pace from the acrimony that punctuated the previous and subsequent questions, and will likely become a hallmark with this week's debate hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, and next Thursday's forum offered by Sport Aurora.

By then, this question should once again be old hat, and I hope each candidate is prepared to go first. Each candidate offers a lot to the community ? whether you like it or not ? and it is incumbent on every voter, and indeed, every candidate to bone up on their platforms so they can make an informed decision, or, if you're behind the debate table, land a few barbed points.