MEMORIES OF THE CANADA-RUSSIA SUMMIT SERIES

James Pasternak was elected to City Council in 2010. He comes to City Council as the representative for Ward 10 after serving on the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) since 2006. Councillor Pasternak has deep roots in Ward 10 having lived here with his family for over 20 years. Councillor Pasternak has earned degrees from the London School of Economics and Political Science, the University of Western Ontario and York University. He is a graduate of Toronto's Leaside High School.

The pages of my Canada Russia Summit Series scrap books are fading and yellow. The smell of mildew is there but the text is clear and the excitement of the time still leaps off the page. My photos from a now primitive Kodak camera have stood the test of time but the edges are yellowing. I put them in a mini album only recently. They sat in an envelope at the bottom of a Memories Box for 40 years. I can't find my ticket stub from Game 1 in Montreal, which I attended with my two brothers and father – nor the game program they were selling that night.

I have a sticker that reads "Go Team Canada. The best on ice from Labatt's."

I keep a close eye on my copy of Harry Sinden's book *Hockey Showdown*. Sinden was Team Canada's coach whose famous line, "I blew it. I blew it" sure came close. For the first 40 years I owned the book I had two signatures – Paul Henderson and Ken Dryden. I added 10 more when the players came to City Hall on September 21st, 2012 for our 40th Anniversary Celebration.

In preparation for this article my recollections of the series were not enough. I placed calls to my two brothers to try and fill in the blanks. They helped a bit but 40 years is a long time. My father passed away in May, 2012 and took his memories with him. My Mom did not travel with us to Montreal to see the first game in August 1972. She was too busy packing her bags for Moscow so she could catch the last four games of the series with my father.

These days, anyone less than 45 would probably have a hard time connecting with the series that gripped the country.

In the dog days of summer back in 1972 there was little talk of hockey in our family. We went about our summer activities – swimming and playing in a nearby ravine. But as we drifted toward the end of August everything changed. The buzz about town, across the country and in our household was about the Canada-Russian hockey series.

It was a dramatic time. For the first time the Soviet Union and Canada's best players would face off in an 8-game series.

I'm not sure when I was told our family had four tickets to game one, but when I did the excitement set in. My father (Irwin) and two brothers (Al the older one and Paul, younger) were my co-ticket holders for that famous game; we flew to Montreal on September 1st – the day before the game – with a friend and his father joining us. We stayed in the Château Champlain Hotel located at 1050 de la Gauchetière W. The Canadian team was staying at the same hotel and we camped out in the lobby for autographs.

The excitement on September 2nd, 1972 at the Montreal Forum was electric, as over 18,000 fan piled in. When we got to our seats, we realized that we were right behind the glass. We had a back end view of some goalie named Vladislav Tretiak.

I was an avid teenage collector and created two scrap books of magazine and newspaper clippings of the entire series. The post card of the hotel and the letterhead supplied in our room are pasted into page 2.

I had a Kodak camera at the game, sitting behind the glass clicking shots. I caught the opening warm up; the ceremonial dropping of the puck and of course the action in our end throughout the game. The pictures weren't great but they captured the essence of a historic game through the lens of an old camera and a 13-year old hockey fan.

At the opening ceremonies I have a shot of Don Awrey, Frank Mahovlich, Bobby Clarke, Ken Dryden and Tony Esposito standing on the blue line as then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau steps onto the red carpet. I have another shot of Don Awrey trying desperately to stop Soviet forward Vladimir Shadrin. Another shows Phil Esposito skating away from Vladislav Tretiak.

In the section just above us an errant puck hit a spectator. He was escorted out, dripping blood.

When the expectations are very high there is nowhere to go but down. And down they did. After a quick start the Canadians struggled. In a cryptic way of covering up the mess, a mysterious fog rose from the ice surface. We entered the building on electricity. We left as a candle lit vigil.

I like much of the country caught the rest of the series on television. I was home, in school rooms, watching in store windows. Could anyone think of anything else at that time? As to the final game and winning goal, I was home in the basement of our house watching a not so great image on a TV that had seen better days. Our cleaning lady was there as well. Like millions of others, we watched in shock, relief and joy as that puck went into the Russian net.

I'm on Toronto City Council now, having won in Ward 10 in the 2010 municipal election. With four years as a Trustee on the Toronto District School Board, I have learned that histories are built upon a series of events that resonate. They dominate our generational collective thoughts and create a collective experience.

It is with that in mind that I brought a motion to City Council in April, 2012 to have the city celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Canada-Russia Summit Hockey Series. Toronto had a special place in that historical series. Many of the players were from Toronto, the training camp was held at Maple Leaf Gardens and the second game – our only victory in Canada – occurred in Toronto. Of course, the rain-soaked victory party took place in Nathan Phillips Square on the night of October 1st, 1972.

Our celebration started on September 21st, 2012. The City, in partnership with Canada's Walk of Fame and Smart Centres, hosted a lunchtime celebration at Nathan Phillips Square. Twenty-one players from the 1972 Canada team attended including Paul Henderson, Ken Dryden and Bobby Clarke. I was invited to present the congratulatory certificate to the team. Paul Henderson accepted it on behalf of those in attendance. City of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford read the Proclamation. Paul handed me a Team Canada sweater.

People crammed into Nathan Phillips Square to see and cheer on their hockey heroes – just as 80,000 had forty years earlier when the players were welcomed back after their series win. Jim Cuddy of Blue Rodeo performed after the presentation.

It was truly an honour to meet so many of the players who I remember cheering on 40 years ago. I brought my photos that I took at the game in Montreal. It was wonderful to be able to share my memories with the players. Even decades later, their enthusiasm for the series has not waned and they are still happy to share stories and memories. Some looked great and stood the test of time.

The event included the famous Team Canada jersey that Paul Henderson wore during the series. It looked like a relic from a bygone era which very few Canadians can relate to.

The City Ward I represent is home to the largest number of Russian-speaking Torontonians and it was wonderful to see how both communities now look back fondly on this series. While a friendly rivalry still remains, forty years later we can now look back at the series as a landmark moment between our two great countries. It not only changed the game of hockey but also opened up a dialogue between us that hadn't previously existed. They may never forgive Bobby Clarke for breaking Valeri Kharlamov's ankle but they will never deny how this sporting event changed our two countries.

The eight-game exhibition hockey series between Canada and Russia in September, 1972 was perhaps the most transformative sporting event of that generation. I wonder of the 18,000 who were in the Montreal Forum that evening 40 years ago, how many are still around to tell the tale. Certainly by the law of averages it is unlikely that one third "who were there" are alive today. My father has passed away and Alan Eagleson is in exile. I never saw another event at the Montreal Forum. My return trips there were for skiing. Perhaps my brother Paul who was eight at the time, was one of the youngest people in the building.

For now the scrap books and the photo albums are going back into storage. After all, 10 years is a long time and that's when I'll reach for them again as we'll celebrate 50 years since the 1972 Summit Series.