

Bill Rea ? Feeling let down

It was a little more than a year ago when I was feeling a certain amount of let down.

I remember because I'm feeling a modified version of it these days, with the end of the Olympics in Rio.

I well remember covering the equestrian events in Palgrave at last year's Pan Am Games. Indeed, I cannot conceive that I will ever forget the experience. I had been looking forward to the whole thing, and was very glad I was able to see so much of it happen.

The equestrian events for those games ended July 25. It was a Saturday, and I remember it so well because it was also my wedding anniversary. The individual show jumping was sort of a command performance for me, so I applied a certain amount of charm, and got permission to work that day (don't worry ? a nice, romantic dinner followed). But once the jumping was over and the interviews were done, it was time to head back to the shuttle bus for transportation to Albion Hills Conservation Area, to where my car was parked.

I remember how struck I was by the lack of activity. I could see people in the show jumping ring, taking the various jumps apart. But that was it, as far as human action was concerned.

There was one occasion, during the walk to where the buses were waiting, when I actually rotated myself 360 degrees, and saw not a soul. I had been there many times over the previous several days, and during that time I knew the only way I was going to get any privacy was to go into one of the Johnny-On-The-Spots. Yet there I was, all alone.

That's when I got to feeling let down. In remembered how much I had looked forward to the Games, especially the local component. I even risked my wife's wrath by spending the bulk of our anniversary working. But I also reflected on the fact that my part of the whole event was at least minor. There were many people who had devoted years of work to help bring the Games about. I got to meet a few of them as things progressed. I remember Grant Black, who helped me get through some of the many accreditation problems I encountered (I do hope he's well).

Life has told me there are few feelings more satisfying than the thought of a job well-done, but there is also the feeling of let down when things are finished.

I had full appreciation for what the people who had worked so hard to bring the Pan Am Games about had to go through at the end. After all that work, what were they to do after it was all done.

It was easy for me a year ago. I had a wonderful woman to have dinner with at the end of it all.

Thus I am feeling a certain appreciation for what certain people in Rio must be going through. They have worked hard to create something wonderful, and now many of them have little more to look forward to than the dismantling of it all.

While this column will appear in print Thursday, after the Games have been concluded, it was written over the weekend. It was started Friday night, as I watched a couple of events (as Beth channel-hopped between the Olympics and the Blue Jays losing to Cleveland). I saw the Canadian men take the bronze in the 400-metre relay, although it is a fact I have a hard time rejoicing when my country wins a medal on a technicality. Facts are facts ? the Americans completed the course faster than the Canadians.

But there were also the good moments. It was nice to see Rosie MacLennan of King City win the gold. I was hoping for better from the equestrian team, but Eric Lamaze did well winning the individual bronze. SouthFields Village resident Ashley Lawrence, a member of the women's soccer team, boldly told me they had their eyes set on making the podium. How right she was!

And what can be said about Andre De Grasse that hasn't already been said? As great as he is, there's no doubt he was on the heels of a better runner.

And now it's over. And as I alluded to above, I feel a certain amount of empathy for the people in Rio who worked so hard to put on the show. I also feel for the people involved, including organizers, athletes, the media, and all those who made the trip. After so much anticipation, there's got to be a big void.

There were concerns that Rio was not the place to hold the Games. With that in mind, I have to wonder what would have been the right place.

It is true that there were concerns that there might be an act of terrorism. Alas, that's not impossible in these times, but they could happen no matter where the Games are held. Could anyone have predicted the debacle that took place in Munich in 1972?

There has been talk that Toronto, or the Toronto area, could some day host the Olympics. True, there were last year's Pan Am games, which seem to have been successful, although there are a lot of questions on how the finances finally worked out.

Despite the fond memories of last year's Games, I think I would oppose any efforts for something like that again.

I also have memories of the last couple of times serious bids have been made from the big city to the southeast. There was the effort to host the 1996 Games, but people in Toronto were not united in the cause. There was a lot of opposition, so it wasn't too surprising that TO lost out to Atlanta.

And then there was the bid for the 2008 Games. It was born late in 1997. I was working in Toronto at the time and was on hand the day Mel Lastman was sworn in as the first mayor of the megacity. That was his big pronouncement of the day.

By the time the bid kicked into high gear, I was no longer working in Toronto, but I was close enough to the city to keep track of what was going on. While the internal support in the city was strong this time out, it was clear that many of those who would be calling the shots had already made up their minds. In the end, it seemed to me that a lot of money had gone into a hopeless cause. I like to think most smart people make a point of never putting too much effort into a game when it's obvious things are stacked against them.

For the last several years, my attitude has been if the Olympic authorities want Toronto to host Games, they'll make such desires well known. And until such word comes down, the time, money and effort would be directed at other worthy endeavours, and there are lots of them around.

In the meantime, we still have the memories of these Games just ended, and lots to look forward to in 2020 in Tokyo.

