

Bill Rea ? Hard to score debates

Some men are blessed with real charm, and I guess I'm one of those men.

How do I know?

Last Thursday evening, I was able to talk my wife into passing up on watching the division-leading Toronto Blue Jays beat up on the Atlanta Braves so I could tune the one TV?in our house to the leaders' debate.

I don't care what you think. That took a lot of charm.

Whether it was worth it is, well, debatable. I found it, in turns, interesting, entertaining, incoherent and, as things wore on, tedious. If a televised event like that is going to last more than an hour, then organizers should include a brief break in the middle for people to answer calls of nature, or at least switch over to see how the Jays are doing.

Early on, Beth turned to me and said, ?Thomas Mulcair looks a bit like you.?

In the interest of domestic tranquility, I'll not put on the public record how I responded.

I've heard and read various opinions on who won and who performed the best. I've heard positive and negative comments on each of the leaders, as well as moderator David Walmsley.

From my view, I thought Walmsley did a very good job, given the format he had to work with. There was a lot of bickering among the leaders. Very few people will admit it, but I think that's what a lot of them were hoping for. Walmsley was smart enough to let it go on for a while, but knew when to step in and break it up. I also thought he was very even-handed, once he got the three guys to shut up, when it came to who he gave the floor to.

I think the free-for-alls are important parts of a debate like this, but I also think the format has to include opportunities for participants to speak without interruption. Perhaps the format should include provisions for each candidate to present 30-second summaries at the end of each segment.

I'm hard-pressed to pick a clear winner.

Tom Mulcair I thought presented himself as the most calm and dignified of the three. The man has a reputation for being quick tempered, so I think he did himself a lot of favours with the way he handled himself. On the other hand, I thought when it came to substance, he was the weakest of the three.

I thought Harper and Trudeau made a mistake early in the session by going after each other, leaving Mulcair to look statesmanlike. But Harper got better as things went on. I also don't think I had ever seen Harper as animated as he was.

Trudeau did a good job of maintaining his infrastructure investments will create jobs and that neither of the other two have plans to create jobs. Neither Harper or Mulcair refuted that.

I rolled my eyes a bit when Trudeau asked the audience if they were better off today than they were 10 years ago. Ronald Reagan became President of the United States 35 years ago using that strategy, but his situation was a lot different then. I thought Harper handled that beautifully by asking the audience what other country they would have wanted to live in over the last 10 years. Trudeau is no Reagan, and Harper is no Jimmy Carter.

There was a lot of interrupting on the parts of all three. I didn't notice anyone was particularly ahead in terms of frequency, although a lot of comments I've heard and read indicate Trudeau was more guilty than the other two. I'm not sure I agree. I recall when all three were talking at once, Trudeau's voice seemed to come through more clearly.

No matter, I think that turned some observers away from Trudeau.

The one part of the debate that made me angry was the absence of Green Party Leader Elizabeth May. I know a lot of Green supporters were angry about that, if not all of them. I don't blame them

The arguments in defence of that was she has no hope of being asked to form a government. That's true. But we are in a unique situation in this election. There are three leaders with realistic chances of being Prime Minister after Oct. 19. There have been plenty of election campaigns in which the best the NDP could hope for was having the balance of power in a minority government. I don't think anyone ever seriously thought that Ed Broadbent, Audrey McLaughlin or Alexa McDonough was going to be PM, yet they were always included in the debates.

I used to oppose including the Greens in the debates, arguing they will have earned the right to be at the table once they demonstrate they can elect some MPs. They proved that with May's election in 2011, so room should have been made for her. The Bloc Québécois had seats in the House when the election was called, so they deserved representation in the debate too.

True, it was a media outlet putting the session on, so it was their party. But I would have expected a bit more objectivity.

No matter, I don't think there was a clear winner or loser last Thursday night.

Looking at things more locally, I don't think there was a clear winner last Tuesday night at the all-candidates' meeting in Bolton,

although the crowd was clearly on the side of Liberal Ed Crewson.

It would be very dangerous to take too much out of that. All it proved is there were more Crewson supporters in that room at that given time, and nothing else. It's no indicator of how many supporters he has in the community. I've been covering elections for more than 30 years, and I know there's a big difference between the numbers who get out to meetings and get out to vote.

And some of the Crewson supports could use etiquette lessons too. A bit of heckling, while maybe tacky, can be tolerated and is often part of the political process. But trying to shout down a worthy candidate at a public debate is unacceptable.

I'm a voter in Dufferin-Caledon too. I want to hear what these candidates have to say, without interruption. If I had really wanted to hear the audience drowning out the speakers, I would have stayed home and watched the Jays.

We're all for free speech and freedom of expression, but political meetings like the one last week are for adults, so those attending are expected to behave accordingly. If these jokers want to voice their views in public, let them declare their candidacy and join the others on stage. Maybe there will be some there to heckle them.

I thought Conservative incumbent David Tilson did a good job of keeping his cool, since he was the target of most of the heckling, and Crewson tried to settle the crowd down too.

It's unfortunate, but true, that politics is not often suited to good manners. It's still interesting and fun to watch, although there are some who would just as soon watch the Jays

