

Bill Rea ? Looks like a job well done

I expect all of us have been through experiences that we have prepared for over some extended time.

A lot of work goes into these events, and anticipation is high. And once it's going, in the midst of the chaos, we get the gut feeling that things are going well. And then it's over.

I was in touch with such feelings Saturday afternoon as I was taking my leave of the OLG Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park in Palgrave.

I was there covering the individual show-jumping competition in the Pan Am Games, having applied a lot of sweet talk to my wife to get her permission to work on our 17th anniversary. I got there early, taking the opportunity to actually explore the grounds (something I had not been able to do on previous occasions), checking out some of the vending booths. I bumped into a few people I knew and chatted a bit.

And then there was the actual competition. Being a loyal Canadian, I walked in with high hopes for our side, considering the gold medal team performance that had been turned in last Thursday, and ended up being disappointed. I was hoping, at best, that I would hear O Canada played, but I was willing to settle just for a medal, if it came to that. The effort was gallant on the part of the three Canadian men, but not sufficient. And it is also true that the three people who ended up on the podium richly deserved to be there. I was there for the medal presentation, and was once again struck by the expressions of the faces of the people having medals hung around their necks. Mayor Allan Thompson had previously presented medals, and from what he later told me, he too seemed to have been awed by the experience.

Then I stayed around for the session between the medalists and the media. I even got in my question about what they thought of the facility, and received the appropriate reply

But eventually, it was time to go. I did have a wife who had been abandoned for most of the day, waiting to be taken out to dinner for our anniversary.

It was a long walk from the media area to the place where the shuttle buses were loading for the trip back to the parking area at Albion Hills Conservation Area, and by that point, the crowds were well ahead of me. I noticed a lot of dismantling was going on. The booths that had been selling food and souvenirs (I got a good start on my Christmas shopping last week) were closed and deserted. There was a station at which people could refill their water bottles free of charge to stay hydrated (very important under such conditions). I thought to top up mine on the way out, and found it had been shut down (I still had enough water to get me home). Glancing into the main show ring, I saw crews taking down the various jumps which had been the objects of the competition. As I made my way further along the path, I realized I was by myself. I looked right around a couple of times and saw not another person. There was just a lot of open space, broken up by fences festooned with banners that were bright with the colours of the Games. And I was willing to bet it would just be a matter of hours before they were history too.

Considering all the activity that had been going on over the past several days, with throngs of people heading in every direction possible, the sudden serenity seemed almost eerie.

After all the work that went into getting the park ready to host the games, along with the sweat and effort it took to actually put the show on, I detected a heavy case of 'let down' was in the cards for many of the people involved.

True, there was still a lot of work involved in taking it all apart, But I knew as I made my lonely progression, that it was just a matter of days until all that would be left was memories, along with a certain sense of satisfaction over a job well done.

It also dawned on me that while I was thinking of the situation in Palgrave, conditions would have been pretty much the same at every site that hosted events at the Games, with the possible exception of those that will be hosting Parapan Am Games events too. But their time will come.

Saturday presented me with lots of time to walk about and talk to people. The one thing that was not in evidence was negativity. True, there was a bit of a disappointment that the Canadians didn't do better, but that's part of a sporting event. Aside from that, I was among throngs of people having a good time.

As well, there was the unique experience of being among people from various other countries. Many of the countries represented had their own cheering sections in the stands, and as the competition wound down, they got more wound up.

At the risk of creating an international incident, while I had no real cheering interest after the Canadians had been eliminated, I found myself pulling for Andres Rodriguez to take the gold Saturday, if for no other reason than I was curious to hear what the Venezuelan national anthem sounded like (I am well familiar with The Star Spangled Banner).

If there's one major memory that people in the Greater Toronto Area can carry away from these Games, it deals with how well things worked out in the end. True, there were a few glitches. I ought to know, considering the number of hoops I personally had to jump

through to be able to cover the competitions in Palgrave. But seldom does a project of this scale go off without some issues. For example, we heard a lot of complaining in the days leading up to the Games about high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on the major highways. But once things got going, they seemed to sort themselves out. I had a medical appointment in Toronto last Thursday, requiring me to drive Highway 427. Traffic seemed to be a bit heavier in the other lanes, in which I was obliged to drive because I was alone, but things weren't too bad. Granted, I suspect a lot of people were smart enough to adjust their driving habits on the assumption that things were going to get a little tricky during the Games.

I have watched Games like this (Olympics, Pan Ams, etc.) on TV lots of times in the past. I remember in 1967, Canada's Centennial year, much was made of the fact the Games were being held for the first time in Canada (in Winnipeg). I was just nine at the time, but I remember my family used to gather around the TV every night to watch the coverage.

For the last several days, what I had watched on TV for many years became part of my reality.

Like I stated above, there are going to be plenty of memories of these Games. And I know I'll have them too

