

Bill Rea ? No sweat with Olympic hockey

Anyone who knows me is aware that I can be somewhat high-strung.

Actually, I have always been like that, from as far back as I can remember. I get very tense when I find myself in tight situations that either have arisen because of my own actions or if I have the feeling that some act on my part might get me out of it, if I can just think of something.

That's not to say it's a bad thing. With tension sometimes comes adrenalin, which often enhances performance. I believe some of the best work I've ever done has been when I was under the gun.

But more important is the way I handle situations over which I have no control. I'm usually rather serene at times such as that.

A good case in point occurred about 15 years ago, when my work colleagues and I realized one day that the company for which we had been labouring was about to go out of business. We hadn't heard anything definite, but the signs were all there. The main indicator was all our paycheques from the previous week had bounced, and our employers were nowhere to be found. Since none of us had anything better to do, we all spent the day cleaning out our desks.

Naturally, there was a lot of tension in the office, but I was dealing with things just fine.

At one point, one of my colleagues expressed surprise at how calm I was. I simply told her I was in this mess through no fault of my own, and there was nothing I could do to get me out of it. So what was there to fret about?

Such a fatalistic approach to matters I can't control came in handy last Thursday, as I listened to radio commentators write off Canada's women's hockey team because they were trailing 2-0 in the third period (how's that for an indirect way to comment on the Olympics?).

I'm as patriotic as any other Canadian, so I was naturally hoping for the best from our athletes. But as things looked rocky for our hockey team, my thoughts became more practical.

?It's only a game,? I thought to myself, also realizing that a silver medal, while not great, is still pretty good. Having my side come up short, while disappointing, is not devastating. I guess being a Toronto Maple Leaf fan has helped me develop perspective at times like that.

I wasn't able to follow the game closely, as I spent part of the afternoon in the dentist's chair, and I was hearing comments on the radio as I drove back to the office. But even though I realized things weren't looking good, I also knew things were not hopeless. My mind went back to that memorable day in 1972 (it's a little upsetting to realize that most people reading this probably have no memories of that event) when Team Canada came back from a two-goal deficit going into the third period and ended up beating the Russians.

I was home from school that day (school let out early because the football team had a game, but I think most of the kids rushed to the nearest TV).

The score was tied 2-2 when I got home, and the Soviets eventually went up 5-3 by the end of the second period. As the lead piled up, I recall feeling disappointment, but little in the way of despair.

?Oh well,? I remember thinking as the fifth Soviet goal was announced. ?It's only a hockey series.?

That might sound like pretty broad thinking for a 14-year-old kid. What it actually was simply a guy who understood the reality of the situation, appreciating that things don't always go the way we want and the fact that there wasn't much he could do about it.

I have sometimes wondered how many Canadian fans gave up at that point and didn't bother watching the rest of the game. Despite my fatalism, I watched the third period, and was very glad that I did.

So no matter how bad things looked last Thursday, I was ready to neither panic or pack it in. Canada was only down by one goal by the time I got back to the office, and there were people there able to keep track on how things were going. I boldly predicted in the late going that the Canadians were going to pull it off.

History records I was right.

After all that drama, it seemed the triumph of the men's team was almost anti-climatic.

I didn't see Friday's game against the Americans (I had too much work to do). I briefly toyed with the idea of going to one of local sports bars to get some pictures of the crowds watching the game. I dropped the idea when I realized most of the people there were probably playing hooky from work, and there would be a lot of folks angry at me if such a picture appeared in print. My job sometimes requires me to make people mad, but this was one of those occasions when I didn't see the need to go looking for trouble. I guess I could have watched parts of the game that evening, but my wife and I went out instead.

It was a different matter Sunday, however.

As many of you know, Ritchie Brothers in Bolton invited the community in for a screening of the Gold Medal game, in support of

Caledon Community Services and the Canadian Ball Hockey Association.

I had originally planned to drop in at some point and get some pictures. Yet my mind changed for some reason the night before, and I decided to get there as early as possible. I think I was concerned about starting to watch the game at home, and then getting too wrapped up in things to break away.

Thus I hauled my aging carcass out of the sack at around 6 a.m., kissed Beth (we had originally intended to watch the first part of the game together, so I think she was a little peeved at the change of plans) and made my way to the facility in Bolton. Unlike bars in a certain municipality I could think of, the beer was not flowing, but the Tim Hortons coffee was, and there were lots of Timbits.

I counted close to 100 people there, many dressed in red and white (I was actually one of the few exceptions), and it was obvious that everyone was having a good time. The fact that the good guys won probably helped.

There wasn't much drama; certainly not on the order that we had in last Thursday's game. But I think things held everyone's interest, even if it's clear our guys had the Swedish crew at bay for most of the match. I was mindful too, at the risk of seeming patronizing, that anything American women could do, so could Canadian men, and that includes blowing leads.

It was clear to me, and I think just about everyone else, that the team that deserved to win actually did. I was little uncomfortable that all four of the officials on the ice were drawn from the NHL?ranks. How many times have we all heard that it's not enough to be clean ? you have to look clean too? I also wondered how many noticed that there was a stoppage of play late in the third period. I looked at the clock on the screen to see how much time was left, and was surprised to see the clock still running; for at least five seconds after the whistle. It made no impact on the outcome, but things like that shouldn't happen.

But the team that deserved to win the day did, and a lot of people had a lot of fun watching them do it. Things like that should happen, a lot more frequently than they do

