

## Bill Rea ? Surviving what happened to Jays

I think we can stop mourning now.

Sports have been playing a pretty big role in the lives of people living in this area.

I guess many of us are still getting over the euphoria of the Olympics, and maybe looking forward to a year or so when the next Winter Games take place.

But of more immediate concern has been exploits of the Toronto Blue Jays.

Much of what you are about to read was actually written for last week's paper. It had been written before the first game between the Jays and Cleveland Indians, and I stressed the point that I was being a little guarded.

There were a lot of high hopes in this part of the world. A place in the World Series was a very real possibility for the local baseball heroes, and I'm willing to bet a lot of you were already surreptitiously adjusting your schedules to be able to watch as much of the action as possible.

But I guess I was a little reluctant to go out on too much of a limb before things had actually started (and the release of the list of Top 100 Leafs provided an opportunity to spout off that was a bit too hard to pass up). I had no way of knowing how that series was going to go, and I stated it was entirely possible it could be over by the time the column appeared in print ? little did I suspect.

I'll share my theory, however, because I think there were a lot of people out there who thought the way I did (frightening).

My theory was the Jays could get by Cleveland. If they were able to sweep the Texas Rangers, then I could see that anything was possible. On the other hand, Cleveland swept Boston, meaning there were probably a lot of people in Ohio using the same logic as I. I really didn't think the series would end that quickly, although I certainly knew it was possible. The wishful thinker in me toyed with thoughts of people reading these words while the Jays were waiting to learn who they would be playing in the World Series. Hope does spring eternal.

I watched the Jays advance when they beat the Rangers. I was watching the game instead of the second Clinton-Trump debate (we taped the debate and watched it the following evening). I was excited as any other fan when Josh Donaldson's hand swept across the plate to end things. It's generally agreed that was a case of heads-up base running. But the fact is that should have been a double play that ended the inning, not the game. No matter who wins, I much prefer to see crucial games settled by fine ball playing, as opposed to an error.

Here endeth my sanctimony, for the moment.

I also knew the Jays were going to get a couple of days to rest and heal, but I was also mindful that such time could be used to get rusty. On the other hand, Cleveland had had a couple of days off too. So a key issue was who was going to be the most rusty.

The series with the Rangers ended the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend. That was a bit of relief, since I knew the fourth game was scheduled for the Monday afternoon, and I had to work (yes, I know it was a holiday, but that never applies to me).

Everyone was back at work Tuesday, and there was some talk in the office that Vegas odds makers were picking the Jays to go all the way. I had not yet done the necessary research to verify that, and I was inclined to consider that premature, although we are all entitled to hope.

There were a lot of upset people in these parts over the way the games in the series against the Indians had been scheduled, with the prime-time starts favouring the National League series. I was a little annoyed at that too, but I like to think I have some understanding of the way the world works. The TV networks wanted to get the best prime-time crowds, and I think it's safe to say there are more baseball fans interested in the Cubs or Dodgers than the Indians or Jays. From where I sit, it sounded like simple economics.

Besides, if the Jays had managed to get by Cleveland, then all baseball fans would be watching, meaning no one would get particular consideration in the scheduling.

I had gone as far as to hope it would be the Cubs the Jays faced if they got into the Fall Classic. The scheduling would have been a lot easier for most of us who have to work the next morning, as opposed for waiting for late games in California. And it would have been easier for Jays fans to get down to the Windy City.

Most of Toronto fans were hoping for the best, but the reality is the whole issue will be over in just a couple of weeks. That's going to require something of an adjustment.

For the last several months, I've been getting home from work at night, and finding the household schedule being predicated on when the ball game starts. And if it happened that I had to work very late, one of the first questions I would ask my wife when I got home was ?How did the Jays do??

I would usually pause long enough to make sure she was still awake before putting that question to her. She was usually awake

enough to reply.

True, each team gets a certain number of nights off, which sort of left complicated questions about what to do with the evening. We somehow managed.

And we'll get through the absence to baseball over the next couple of months. There are other things on TV, and one of these days I might get time to actually watch some of them.

Besides, there will still be the Leafs to watch, and they don't play every night.

There have been a couple of games so far. I saw the first two goals in the NHL career of Auston Matthews, who went on to do all the Leafs' scoring in the 5-4 loss. I went to sleep that night wondering where the rest of the team was. In the games that have followed, it looks like other players are stepping up and making contributions. They've compiled some pretty nice looking leads so far. Now if they can just stop blowing them.

No matter what happened last week, there can be no denying that despite some rocky moments in the season, the Jays did live up to expectations. They did make it to the post-season and managed to advance. Very little room for complaining in this corner. And we do have the Leafs to look forward to. A rather rough start does not a season make, so this might be the year when they actually start demonstrating that they belong in the big league.

There's always hope

