

Bill Rea ? This sports fan is back, sort of

I attended last week's all-candidates' meeting hosted by the Caledon Chamber of Commerce, and I wasn't alone.

Yes, I know. They show these meetings to many people at a time, including candidates, media, people who have stacked the meeting to try and create a certain impression, and maybe one or two members of the general public who had yet to make up their minds on how to vote and actually attended to try and learn something about the ongoing campaign, which mercifully comes to an end today (Thursday).

So it was a pretty full house sharing the meeting held at James Bolton Public School with me, and my date.

You see, my wife attended the meeting with me. While I was sitting there, taking notes like mad, Beth was sitting there, being entertained.

It really wasn't my idea. Beth mentioned the previous evening that she was interested in attending, realizing of course that I was planning to attend. I was a little surprised, but just a little.

Beth, of course knows about my interest in politics. And she had met the four candidates who were expected to be (and in fact were) on hand for the meeting (Libertarian candidate Daniel Kowalewski did not attend). But her interest in going did catch me a little off guard.

I made no effort to talk her out of it. For one thing, political meetings like that are public, meaning anyone is allowed to attend, provided they behave themselves. Considering the way some of the people attending the session conducted themselves, Beth would have presented no problems, as anyone who knows her would have realized. Besides, even if I had a problem, I had no right to prevent my wife or anyone else from attending.

So she and I started discussing our schedules for the day, and worked out the necessary arrangements to make them mesh (we even worked in time for a rather leisurely dinner before the meeting ? I'm such a sport).

Beth obviously saw nothing wrong with sharing the world of politics with me, especially since the Blue Jays weren't playing that night. They had played an afternoon tilt in Detroit that day, and won.

The issue (Blue Jays, that is) even came up as we entered the school for the meeting. We encountered Councillor Doug Beffort and his wife Doreen as we walked up the path (lest anyone get the idea we were double-dating). But the fact there was no ball game worth watching on the tube was discussed, as I mentioned I had heard the Jays had won, although I hadn't heard the score. The chap walking behind us, with his arms full of NDP signs, was happy to fill in the information I was not able to.

Thus it was a happy group of people who walked into the school for a political meeting.

Isn't it amazing how a sports team on a roll can momentarily take people's minds off an election?

Good heavens, the Blue Jays have even attracted my attention again. It's been a long time. But my interest has not yet returned with the passion that I once possessed.

I am a man who was once a boy, and I have lived my entire life in this part of Canada, meaning I spent most of my life with a passion for the Toronto Maple Leafs. I will never forget the grin on my father's face when he told me he had scored tickets to the Leaf game scheduled for my seventh birthday. The memory actually does a good job of overpowering the fact Chicago won the match 6-3 (my old man had only so much clout).

Watching the Leafs was a staple in the Rea home Saturday nights during the season while I was a little kid. And at that time, we didn't even get to see the whole game. The puck dropped at 8 p.m. in those days, but the TV coverage didn't start until 8:30.

Actually, that wasn't much of a burden, since we also enjoyed the Jackie Gleason Show (our favourite part was Joe the Bartender with Frank Fontaine as Crazy Guggenheim). And there was a certain amount of anticipation as we waited for Bill Hewitt to come on and tell us who was winning.

And then there was football. For a lot of years, my folks had season tickets for the Argos, and I would usually get to a game or two over the campaign. Great seats too, in the old CNE Stadium (sometimes referred to as the Mistake by the Lake); right at the top of the covered stands, exactly at midfield.

I also well remember how Toronto went nuts in 1983 when the Argos won the championship for the first time in 31 years. It was the first time that had happened since I arrived on Spaceship Earth.

And then we've had the Blue Jays. It took a couple of years of having them in town before I really got interested in the game of baseball. By the mid '80s, when it became clear they were about to make some real noise, most people in these parts were interested.

I spent a couple of weeks in Ireland in June 1985. Since this was long before the days of the internet and emails, details of how the Jays were doing were hard to come by on the other side of the Atlantic.

For the flight home I found myself sitting next to the seat where one of the flight attendants had to position herself for takeoff, and we chatted a bit as the plane was taxiing. Since she told me she lived in Toronto, I asked her how the Jays were doing. She said she didn't really keep track of such things (had I been older and wiser, I might have thought of something else to discuss with a flight attendant).

But after we had been in the air about 20 minutes, she appeared at my seat to tell me she had conveyed my inquiry to the pilot. I was told his reply essentially was he didn't know how the Blue Jays were doing, but since the weather had been nice, he assumed all birds were doing well.

At that moment, I briefly considered getting out and walking home, rather than entrusting my one life to this joker. I didn't. And like most people in these parts, I cheered when the Jays finally won it all, although my jubilation was somewhat muted by the fact the big event took place less than a week after my father's death.

It wasn't too long after this that my interest in sports started to seriously falter.

What really killed it was the labour foolishness that went on in professional sports.

I have been a capitalist all of my life, so I understand that owners of teams want to make money, and should do all they legitimately can to make money. I have also been a working man all my life, and I appreciate that a worker's skills and talents are a marketable commodity, and they have the right to seek as much as they can get for them.

But it is a fact that most of these people could easily treat my annual salary as their clothing allowance, and that reality should have resulted in different dynamics in labour-management relations.

But after almost 20 years, it is clear that my interest in professional sports is returning. It isn't yet at the level it once was. I could probably only name a handful of the players on the Jays, but that's better than what I could have done a couple of years ago.

But if I find myself in conversation with a flight attendant on a taxiing aircraft, I'm not likely to ask her about baseball.

I'll ask her about politics

