

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Cheering for the Indians

And now for something completely different: baseball instead of politics.

Regular readers will have no reason to know that your humble scribe, in addition to being a serial political junkie, pretty much lives and dies for baseball each year, particularly ? dare I say ? for the fate of my beloved New York Yankees.

As a child growing up in the 1940s in Prescott, I was lucky to have an uncle living across the river in Messina, N.Y., who taught me the wonders of baseball. Most weekends, I would take the ferry across the St. Lawrence (there wasn't a bridge at the time) to be met at the pier and taken to the game in Ogdensburg, which had a minor league team in the old PONY league.

When I was just seven years old, having ventured no farther from home than Brockville and Ottawa, he took me to New York to see the mighty Yankees play, an event which is just as real to me today as it was then. Hence, my lifelong love affair with the Yankees. As you read this, of course, the World Series will have already begun, this year featuring the two franchises who have gone the longest time without a win, i.e the Chicago Cubs and Cleveland Indians. While I have no particular attachment to either team, as a Yankees fan, I always pull for the American League representative (unless, of course, it's Boston) on the self-serving grounds that if they're good enough to beat the Yankees they deserve to be champions.

You will also know that the local nine, the Blue Jays, once again flamed out before making it to the big stage for the first time since they won their second of two straight in 1993.

And I am here to brazenly tell you why I am happy that the Blue Jays lost.

While the Jays, to be sure, put a powerful lineup on the field, to me at least they were the least likeable team in the game.

There is a certain smugness to all Toronto sports teams ? even the Leafs, for heaven's sake, who haven't won in forever, seem to believe they are special ? that puts off even people like me who have spent a good chunk of their lives living in this great city.

And it's not just the teams themselves. Much of the sports media has adopted the same aren't-we-special attitude towards the local teams.

After the Jays lost in five games to the Cleveland Indians, for example, Globe and Mail sports writer Cathal Kelly portrayed it as ?a steamrolling by an inferior team.?

Really? Well, the ?inferior? Indians did win 94 games during the regular season, five more than Toronto. And before beating the Jays, they swept the Boston Red Sox, the team that finished first in the Jays' division, four games ahead.

The Jays certainly have players to be admired ? Josh Donaldson chief among them ? but they also feature some of the worst whiners and complainers in the game, Jose Bautista as the prime example.

Nothing that happens to the Jays seems to be their fault. No team in baseball cries more about the umpires being out to get them. I've seen Bautista leading off a game and turning to carp at the umpire when the opening pitch was a called strike ? the opening pitch ? an indication of his overheated self-importance, as if he doesn't realize ? or more likely, doesn't care ? that he'll never get a break from those umpires and his selfishness is hurting both himself and the team.

But he's not the only Jay that makes me not want to cheer for them. Time after time, with an opportunity to move a runner by giving themselves up ? and again, with the notable exception of Donaldson ? Jay after Jay went up there trying to be the hero, swinging for the fences, without any apparent regard for what was best for the team, not to mention its rabid fan base.

Don't even get me started on Bautista's (in)famous bat toss, after his dramatic home run last year. I hate that showboat crap in professional sports (which is one thing that has turned me off the NFL, where they do choreographed dance routines after virtually every play).

Nothing wrong with a spontaneous celebration. But it's bush league to show up the other team. Would Torontonians have cheered, let's say, if instead of the home run, the pitcher had struck Bautista out then thrown his glove up in the air to celebrate? Not bloody likely.

Then, of course, there was the manufactured ballyhoo about the ?Indians? nickname, a logo that we're constantly told is racist and demeaning.

Perhaps it is to some ? it's not hard to be offended if you're looking for offence ? but a public opinion poll in the U.S. this fall among American indigenous people found that 90 per cent of the respondents were not ? NOT ? offended by the Washington ?Redskins? moniker, a reality that, as far as I have seen, only the Star's Rosie DiManno has been honest enough to point out.

But we digress. Next year, with Bautista gone, I'll still be cheering for the Yankees, but the Jays will be easier to watch.

