

Sports unite us

BY SHERALYN ROMAN

Every once in awhile (and according to some social media reports it's every 26 years) something comes along that unites us all. An event of epic proportions, an event that - albeit temporarily - lifts the spirits of a city, a province and sometimes, even a country. Often, as with this most recent example, it is a sporting event that accomplishes this. Whether from Caledon or Calgary, Mississauga or Moncton, Bolton or B.C., this time it was the Toronto Raptors who brought together a nation, united under one common theme. In this case, the theme was a dinosaur; the Canadian flag, underdogs vs. Champions and the thrilling ride the Raptors took us on, as they paved the road to victory.

What is it about sport that gathers so many people together? As I write this, I'm streaming video of the celebratory parade with an estimated 2 million people in attendance. Talk about united! United in support, sports teams draw folks from all walks of life. Supporters come from different religions and ethnicities, from different genders and include representation from every type of employment; labourers to lawyers, and from students to seniors. Yet in that support - what we actually all become is simply Canadian, not hyphenated, just Canadian. By nature, I believe Canadians to be quietly but fiercely proud. While we don't hold a hand over our heart as we sing the National Anthem, we do wear our hearts on our sleeves everyday. We help people, we support one another, we are polite and hey, we are even the world's original United Nations peacekeepers - born of an idea originally nurtured by our 14th Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson. We are calm by nature but that calm comes from a place of deep-rooted nationalism and pride and sometimes - sometimes it's hungry for an outlet - an excuse for us to express that pride. In 2019, that excuse came as the Toronto Raptors won first, the Eastern Conference Finals and then (as we all now know) went on to become the NBA Champions, bringing home the Larry O'Brien NBA Championship Trophy to Canada, which is after all, is the place where basketball was born.

Like the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1967 and the Toronto Blue Jays in both 1992 and 1993 (hence the pundits' every 26 years? scenario) the Toronto Raptors united us as a nation, cheering on a common cause. I think what makes this particular event so unique however is that basketball, as a sport, is accessible to virtually everyone and is not subject to fierce regional rivalries. In basketball you don't need a lot of expensive equipment, you don't need more than one ball and a few willing participants and sometimes, you don't even need a designated place to play, a parking lot and portable hoops will do. The appeal of basketball is universal. It's played around the world unlike hockey that still tends to feature more prominently in cooler climates. Whether you're a recent immigrant or can trace your roots back to indigenous culture, basketball is a sport that pretty much anyone can play.

In Bolton, thanks in part to the efforts of Councilors Tony Rosa and Annette Groves and a handful of community partners and corporate sponsors, basketball briefly brought us together in celebration. Forgotten were the traffic woes of downtown Bolton, whether an asphalt plant was coming to Town or what we were going to do with the Old Firehall. Instead we gathered as a community in Bolton's very own makeshift Jurassic Park to watch and support our team, just as many thousands of others did across our great nation. We were Bolton proud, Caledon proud, and more specifically, Canada proud. We don't often like to shout about ourselves but the Raptors gave us an excuse to show our pride out loud. We are a diverse country made up of over 200+ ethno-cultural groups and during the NBA playoffs, we showed the world how multiculturalism not only exists but works. How it enhances our national identity and unites us all under the common banner of Canadian pride. Basketball was our excuse to put our pride on display, pride in a Canadian team, who brought home that special trophy to the country where basketball was born.