

BROCK'S BANTER: Dean Martin's Celebrity Boast

By Brock Weir

Last week, I was in Los Angeles for a slightly belated birthday celebration with four friends who are also celebrating birthdays within a three-week window around this time of year. It was wonderful to catch up with these friends who, while all mutual, have never quite been able to coordinate a get-together with all four of us in the same place at the same time.

It is always interesting to visit California. Aside from warm weather nearly all year 'round, and the beautiful scenery thanks to the nearby Pacific Ocean and numerous unique natural features, it is a fascinating experience to be completely immersed in a place which, in itself, is nearly entirely immersed in the culture of celebrity.

It is not a bad thing, of course. Every city has to have its niche, and Los Angeles' niche might be a bit more glamorous than others. With this, comes a perception that it is a city of Democrats, Lefties and, in the 1950s, Reds, where Republicans get a bad rap. (Of course, those who perpetuate this myth are often ones who put former middling B-movie actors Ronald Reagan and Nancy Davis on his-and-hers pedestals representing all that is right and Right with the world).

This was evident to a degree when I was there, with Bernie Sanders posters, signs ? and a particularly clever mural ? popping up in the most random of places. But, I digress.

Actually, I'm not really digressing because last Sunday morning, I had a chance encounter at Los Angeles International Airport with an entertainment icon, and a particular favourite of mine. (I won't name names in this venue, but I'll give out one clue: my real-life job and his most famous television occupation are one and the same. Did that influence me in this line of work? Most probably)

In addition to acting, he is a noted activist in many arenas and never shies away from giving his opinion on politics, so our conversation headed in this direction rather quickly.

His opinion on the present Canadian government was quite firm and decisive. I like that in a person. I don't particularly care what side of the political spectrum you happen to be on, left, right, or somewhere in between, but I admire people with strength in their convictions and the reasons to back them up.

Let's just say, if Stephen Harper had to choose blindly between this gentleman and Wayne Gretzky in conjuring up an endorsement, the Conservative leader chose wisely.

Over the course of the four-hour-plus trip home to Toronto, I pondered this. And, due to my sleep deprived state, I probably pondered this far longer than I should have: how much weight do these ?celebrity? endorsements carry in Canada?

Canada is unique in not having any particular ?star system? to speak of. Ever since Mary Pickford hit the road to conquer New York and California, acquiring the brand of ?America's Sweetheart? along the way, actors (singers ? and Rachael McAdams ? are a different story) seem to either head south to seek fame and fortune, or remain in Canada to generate Canadian content and be on the forefront of building an industry. Canadian actors who bask in the rare glory of a hit Can-Con TV series have no trouble balancing this while flitting back and forth between community theatre, commercials, or holding down another, better paying, reliable job.

So, Mr. Harper found his star endorsement from a Canadian who needs no introduction around the world. Mr. Mulcair found his star backing in Donald Sutherland and, most recently, American comedian Sarah Silverman (who also threw her weight behind a British Columbia NDP candidate). Let's face it, though: Mr. Mulcair didn't have to go far to get the Sutherland Seal of Approval. After all, our own far more worldly and sophisticated version of ?The Donald? has always been proud to fly the flag for his former father-in-law's legacy. Sutherland also earmarked Mr. Trudeau as his back-up choice, while Hurricane Hazel McCallion has thrown her considerable clout behind the political scion.

Pamela Anderson seems to be a bit of a wildcard. I've read quotes attributed to her favouring both Mr. Mulcair and Mr. Trudeau, with the former seeming to have a bit of edge. Wear it in good health, Tom.

Endorsements aside, bringing celebrities or other notables officially onto your team can be risky business, as the Conservatives found out recently when several of the ?stars? appointed to the Senate rapidly and publicly lost their lustre. (Let's all thank Nancy Greene for holding up her end of the bargain, so far). Media personalities and ?star candidates? for the Conservatives and Liberals seem to settle in more comfortably in the House of Commons.

But, how many people actually cast their ballots based on whether a party has received a star endorsement or if the name on the ballot itself belongs to a star candidate?

Does having Mr. Gretzky or Mr. Sutherland on your team make any undecided voters sit up straighter in their respective seats to take a closer look at the blue and orange platforms?

Does Ms. Anderson, pausing her re-enactment of her famous Baywatch stride along Wreck Beach long enough to hammer in a sign

for Mr. Mulcair raise any awareness of her political leanings for any part of her demographic who is not already a member of PETA?

Mr. Trudeau might have better luck in flexing the muscle that comes with the large following Ms. McCallion still enjoys in her retirement, but does this play anywhere else but in Southern Ontario?

I have my own doubts, and people were quick to point out that under the new rules neither Mr. Gretzky nor Mr. Sutherland are entitled to vote in this month's Federal election, but I would be very interested in hearing your views.

Certainly it can't be doubted that influential celebrities like Oprah played an important role stateside in getting Barack Obama the nomination and the win the first time around, but I can't think of any cases north of the border that can be viewed in the same lens.

THANK YOU

On a final note, I would like to thank everyone who took the time to wish me a Happy Birthday over the last couple of weeks, including Councillor Jeff Thom who issued a shout-out during Public Service Announcements at Council, former councillor Don Constable who arranged a cake at last month's Vote Smart session for Newmarket-Aurora candidates (and carried through Brevik Hall with aplomb by the mother of event organizer Kelsea Walsh), and for the crowd who sang, accompanying the cake presentation, despite it being absolutely mortifying!

It helped make crossing that threshold into my thirties all the more special.