

Local cadets lead in our international warriors at Invictus



By Brock Weir

They simply wanted to do their bit, but local cadets from St. Andrew's College took centre stage leading athletes from all around the world into the Air Canada Centre on Saturday night for the opening ceremonies of the 2017 Invictus Games.

The Invictus Games, founded by Prince Harry to provide a world-class Olympics-style sporting event for injured and wounded servicemen and women from around the world, opened this past weekend, welcoming hundreds of athletes from 17 different nations.

"In the days ahead, I know many of you will be experiencing Invictus for the first time," Prince Harry told athletes on Saturday. "I hope you will be ready. I hope you will be ready for some fierce competition. I hope you will see the meaning of teamwork which proves that anything is possible when we work together. I hope you're ready to see courage and determination that will inspire you to power through the challenges in your own life. I hope you're ready to see role models in action that any parent will want their children to look up to, and I hope you're ready to see lives change in front of your eyes."

While Prince Harry was addressing the wounded warriors, some of these sentiments had already been felt by members of the Aurora based St. Andrew's College Cadet Corps.

Dressed in their distinctive kilted scarlet uniforms, cadets had the honour of leading the athletes from each nation into the arena, athletes who were loudly cheered on by a crowd of thousands, including not only Prince Harry, but Governor General David Johnston and his wife, Dr. Sharon Johnston, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau, U.S. First Lady Melania Trump, and Premier Kathleen Wynne.

"When we first heard Invictus was coming to Toronto it seemed like a natural fit," says Brian McCue, Commanding Officer of the SAC Cadet Corps. "With an emphasis on athletics, I thought this was a perfect, perfect match for our guys to get involved in some way."

Eager to be a part of Invictus in any way they could, Mr. McCue began putting out feelers, contacting event organizers with a rundown of the 117-year history of the Corps, as well as SAC's emphasis on athletics.

"It was a simple reach-out to say, 'What can we do to help?'" he says. "In the end, there were some opportunities that came up and we could fill those roles very well."

The Cadets ended up forming the honour guard while The Tenors sang the National Anthem and then, the ultimate honour, carrying the placards leading in the celebrated athletes of each nation.

"Our guys got a chance to interact with the teams and meet the athletes, hear and understand some of the challenges these guys and girls have been through and it has been absolutely fantastic. There was so much excitement throughout the whole thing. We were in the middle of one of the largest productions going on in the country, the Prime Minister was 40 feet away, and Prince Harry was right over there. Sarah McLaughlin was standing right next to us waiting to go on and what was really remarkable about the energy of the athletes themselves and the positive feedback from everybody in the room.

"You could see our boys beaming with pride. It didn't matter what team they had. We were all one. It was an incredible feeling of unity and motivation. Everyone was here with common goals and it was just phenomenal. Our boys were just shocked but totally engaged in the whole thing. They were so proud to represent Canadian youth at this event and they were so proud to do their bit."

Their bit, however, is not over yet.

While the cadets hope to attend Invictus events later this week, they will be back to participate in closing ceremonies on Saturday, meet team captains and hopefully Prince Harry too.

?We're there to support right through to the end and then we will help with the big send off for all the international teams,? says Mr. McCue.