

An Evening with Jim Lang generates much timely talk about the rise and fall of the Maple Leafs



Host Andrew Applebaum and Special Guest Jim Lang entertained an appreciative crowd at Richmond Hill's Central Branch Library on Thursday night.

?An Evening with Jim Lang? was enjoyed by dozens of guests and generated much discussion about a team near and dear to the hearts of hundreds of thousands: the ill-fated Toronto Maple Leafs.

Lang's insights on Thursday evening into the Leafs' ongoing woes proved to be prescient as Toronto lost 6-1 to Florida on home ice in Game 7 on Sunday night.

The long-time Morning Man from The Region FM 105.5 pulled no punches regarding the root causes of the NHL squad's malaise and bemoaned a significant Game 5 mistake.

?Marner's behind the back pass that cost the Leafs a goal would have been ridiculed in our beer league.?

He predicted with prophetic accuracy the outcome of Games 6 and 7: ?Here's what's going to happen. The Leafs need to counter what the Panthers have been doing to them in Florida, but they can't play like they did in Game 5 if they come back for Game 7. To lose and play like that with no heart was so embarrassing.?

In a post-event interview, Lang was asked if the Leafs have become the Chicago Cubs (circa 1908-2016) of hockey.

?They are. Both franchises are beloved and both make money from the TV coverage. The similarities are eerie. Both franchises have found ways to break your heart for decades, but the stadiums remain full and the fans remain loyal.?

Applebaum was even more pointed in his criticism of the beloved Leafs.

When asked why the Leafs can't seem to win the Big Game, the Toronto Legends host cited Toronto's problems between the pipes.

?Since they last won in 1967, 93 different goalies have played for the Leafs. Goaltending wasn't an issue this year until it was when Stolarz got hurt. Also, we don't have a Captain that plays like a Captain. They've brought in guys that were captains, but nothing works. The issue remains the disappearance of The Core Four in the playoffs.?

The congenial host noted how much he enjoyed ?getting all kinds of great stories from Jim about great athletes? and Applebaum spurred Lang to roll through the highlights of his illustrious broadcasting and writing career, including insights into his entry level job at Q107 where he worked with legendary radio voices including Steve Warden, John Gallagher, John Derringer, and Joey Vendetta.

?I was surrounded by broadcasting all-stars and my job was to ?show up, keep up, and shut up.?

Lang discussed his transition from radio to television when he moved to Montreal just in time to cover the Canadiens' 1992-93 season that culminated with a charmed Stanley Cup victory.

?It was a magical Spring in Montreal and we enjoyed a very memorable beer-soaked parade. All the players were paraded in flatbed trucks and when I looked over the sides inside the flatbeds, there were over 200 empty cans of beer. One of the players explained to me that they had been drinking since 8 a.m. in celebration and had to pee into their beer cans due to the length of the parade. As the flatbeds rolled by?the sun was gleaming off the Stanley Cup?it was a special day.?

In addition to eliciting commentary from Lang about The Magical Spring of 1993?the last time a Canadian-based team won the Stanley Cup ? Applebaum moved the featured guest seamlessly into his era at Sportsnet as a Leafs beat reporter in 1995.

Lang noted that ?In the 90s, Print Media was King and there was an etiquette. Milt Dunnell, Jim Hunt?the legendary reporters all asked their questions first and TV waited its turn.?

The veteran broadcaster was also reminded about his Super Bowl coverage by Applebaum and Lang recalled ?Eli Manning's amazing performance to defeat Tom Brady.?

?It was one of the craziest things I've ever witnessed. It showed that anything is possible in sports.?

One of the more charming segments of Thursday night's event was a game initiated by Applebaum entitled Internet?True or False. Lang engaged the audience with a number of true responses to getting a production credit on the Tragically Hip's Wheat Kings album, bonding with Jesse Palmer and enjoying night life venues in New York that only Palmer had exclusive access to, and dressing up as Q-107's bear mascot.

In a smooth segue out of fun facts into writing non-fiction, Applebaum explored Lang's writing career that sprung from the broadcaster's many connections with Leafs players that resulted in books about Wendel Clark, Tie Domi, Max Domi, and Brian Berard.

Lang spoke warmly about Clark and noted that ?Wendel never lost a tooth fighting in the NHL. He was a legend as a Toronto Maple Leaf. He's such a good example of being humble and how to behave. He would arrive early for treatments from the training staff and he learned about early starts to the day and the importance of a good work ethic when he would be up at 5 a.m. doing chores on his family's farm in Saskatchewan.?

In Lang's book on Tie Domi, entitled Shift Work, he described the famous Leaf enforcer's ?333 fighting majors that he picked up over his career.?

?Domi rarely lost a fight and teammate Adam Graves explained why. Graves described Tie as freakishly strong. His neck size was 19 inches. When he got hit, his head didn't move. He could pick up a 100-pound dumb bell with one hand.?

After sharing insights into Max Domi ? ?How many people get the chance to write books about a father and a son??Lang moved his focus to valiant defenseman Brian Berard who lost the sight in one eye after an accidental high stick by Marian Hossa.

Berard's famous self-effacing humor was most evident when he apologized to his teammates on losing coverage on a forward by saying, ?Sorry guys?I didn't see him.?

Applebaum shifted the focus on books about hockey players to Lang's more recent works that celebrate the sport itself. In the best-selling series Everyday Hockey Heroes (Volumes 1,2, and 3), Lang expressed his intent to ?tell the stories of all the heroic people who have made hockey accessible for so many people. Hockey is for everyone and I wanted to tell their stories.?

In My Day with the Cup?which climbed to #2 on the Canadian Non-Fiction Best-Sellers List?Lang described the protocols surrounding Lord Stanley's Mug: ?The rule is you have to have won the Cup to touch it.? At that moment, the animated Lang knocked over an amplifier?causing Library tech staff to scurry to his aid and eliciting a warning from Applebaum: ?If you do that again, you're going to lose your library privileges.?

By Jim Stewart