

Blue Jays uniting a nation, one homer at a time

By **Jake Courtepatte**

It's been eleven years since the Montreal Expos packed up and moved to Washington, and twenty-two years since the Toronto Blue Jays have reached the post-season.

Numbers always have a way of putting things into perspective.

Following the Blue Jays 1992-1993 World Series wins, their exciting contention quickly lost its swagger: and, as is usually the case, save perhaps the Toronto Maple Leafs, so did their fan base. The late 1990s saw the dominance of the New York Yankees, and the J.P. Ricciardi era of the 2000s should not have lasted the dismal eight seasons that it did.

The 2004 move of the Expos left Canada with a single team who had just given their worst record since 1980 in the previous season.

But the boys of summer are back, and coming from the perspective of a writer who was too young to remember the Jays' last post-season appearance, seeing the boys of fall has been oh-so-sweet.

A spur of young, energetic athletes has brought the fresh face to Canadian baseball that it so desperately needed.

The Toronto Blue Jays have become an exciting team, led by 20-something players that exude the charisma that has attracted a much younger, hipper fanbase.

While acquisitions such as 30-year old David Price and 31-year old Troy Tulowitzki obviously add consistent depth to the team, it is likely that the young talent who re-energized the team in the 2015 season will continue as the face of the Jays going forward.

Marcus Stroman, the 5'8? wonder who shaves his catchphrase ?Height Doesn't Measure Heart? into his head. Kevin Pillar, who seemingly has no respect for his own well-being while stretching out to make circus catches. Roberto Osuna, the youngest pitcher in American League History to record a save in the postseason.

Who wouldn't want to hop on this bandwagon?

I took in my first game at an Aurora pub ? King Richard's on Yonge Street ? Monday night to watch the Jays crush three home runs en route to an 11 ? 8 game three win over the Kansas City Royals to stay afloat in the ALCS.

Until then, I have taken every opportunity I could to catch the game in downtown Toronto, one of thousands of fans attempting to crowd into one of the city's famed sports bars, whether it be Real Sports on Bay Street, Hoops on Bremner Ave., or Shoeless Joe's on King Street West.

The crowds you see in these locations are the crowds mentioned by sports analysts and Toronto broadcasters all season. The new Blue Jays generation is young, rowdy, and ready to cheer on Canada's team.

So, as I stopped into King Richard's Monday, I expected a much more subdued, restaurant-style setting to settle in and watch the game.

This was not the case.

While the crowd may have been more family-oriented than what is found in the depths of downtown, the proud atmosphere of a fan base finally rewarded was still highly evident. There were audible groans when Alcides Escobar led off the first inning with a triple off Stroman ? those groans soon turned to cheers when Ryan Goins, taking the blame for the loss in Game 2, singled in two runs the next inning.

I talked to another patron, who, like I, had taken a seat around the bar.

He, a middle-aged gentleman in an Oxford shirt, had just left work and ?had to catch the first few innings.?

I made a joke that perhaps he had to watch the game at the bar because at home the television would be turned to something else.

It turned out his wife was coming to meet him there.

?Come Together? could not be a more fitting catchphrase for the 2015 Toronto Blue Jays.

And, as it seems, the execs at Rogers and Bell have taken notice, with the blockbuster deals coming out of the USA in which our solo Canadian team gained some big names.

In May 2010, The Globe and Mail published an article entitled ?Is Baseball Dead in Canada?? I think they spoke too soon, and it just needed a breath of fresh air.

Between the 2014 and 2015 seasons, average Blue Jays home attendance has risen by over 5,000. And these fans are not suits. They are fans, and they are cheering at the top of their lungs.