

BROCK'S BANTER: When a gold watch won't do

By Brock Weir

I had such high hopes for my Thursday.

Over the past two years, Tuesdays and Wednesdays have invariably become the two busiest days of the week for me and, spring kicking into high gear, and more weekend activities to cover popping up and keeping me busy, Thursday morning has become something along the lines of my defacto weekend.

Well, that is usually the case. Sometimes things do crop up that require a bit of schedule-juggling but it usually works out the way ? and last Thursday seemed everything would go according to plan.

Wednesday's work was done in record time, I had enough time to hit the gym, I found out what happens when you're running on an electric treadmill and the power goes out mid-stride, dinner was done at a reasonable hour and it was time to simply zone out for the rest of the night.

Then, I got wind of a story courtesy of the British tabloid The Daily Mail that there had been an emergency meeting called at Buckingham Palace, and even the staff stationed as far away as Scotland had been called in for an unexpected briefing, the reasons for which were, at that time, completely unknown.

We're living in the information age and burgeoning and ever-evolving social media has rendered this appetite for information totally insatiable.

Unusually, there was no statement on the reason for the meeting coming from Buckingham Palace. The reason being, and fair enough, that they wanted to tell the staff first before announcing it to the public. That is all well and good, but something inevitably has to fill the vacuum; and that something was speculation.

This speculation ranged from rumours of an impending abdication, bet-placing on whether an engagement announcement was imminent between Prince Harry and his Toronto-based girlfriend Meghan Markle, to, perhaps more understandably, fears and worry that it might have something to do with the health of our nonagenarian yet seemingly indefatigable monarch and her trusty consort. In fact, the speculation reached such a fever pitch that two unfortunate major media outlets ? one in the United Kingdom and one in France ? reported that the Duke of Edinburgh had died at the age of 95.

As we all knew by Thursday morning, however, that was thankfully not the case and the Duke of Edinburgh had simply decided to announce after nearly 70 years of faithful service to Queen, Country and Commonwealth, that he would no longer be undertaking public duties.

By the time the actual announcement came I breathed a sigh of relief and, ultimately, gratitude for a lifetime of duty well-served, but, truth be told, I was too tired to truly appreciate it at that precise moment.

You see, the frenzied speculation and the silence from Buckingham Palace created the perfect storm for this combination news junkie and monarchist. Sure, I could have made a valiant effort to stick it out but I knew it was an exercise in futility. Had I made the effort I knew I would just be lying awake, staring at the ceiling, thinking about all potentially terrible scenarios I might wake up to. It was easier to ride it out, and I am glad I did because, like so many of the world checking Twitter and other venues all night, I noticed something interesting.

All too often we're served up this image of the Duke of Edinburgh as a noble caricature, always at Her Majesty's side, but always looking for an opportunity to stick his foot in his mouth ? ?dontopedology? is apparently his own word for it. Yet, the tweets and posts that were coming out were of genuine worry and slight unease on just what would happen if he was no longer the ever-present fixture in our collective consciousness that he has been since he and Princess Elizabeth announced their engagement in 1947. Sure, his colourful bon mots were once again trotted out for everyone's amusement, but so too was his record as one of our dwindling veterans of the Second World War, his steadfast commitment to the Commonwealth, his devotion to duty, and the contributions he has made to better the lot of his fellow person through spearheading various programs which continue to flourish to this day.

There was a mock sense of derision in the air when the announcement was finally made ? an ?I stayed up all night for this?!? mentality, but there was also, I observed, a sense of renewed appreciation for the man who has given so much back over his nearly 96 years on earth.

Thankfully, we still have a few months before he bows out of his official role this fall ? although, the palace conceded he is still likely to pop up from time to time ? and, therefore a few more months to give him a good send off. After all, if anyone has earned a nice, comfy retirement, it's him!