

Sports history comes to life through playing with a full deck



By Brock Weir

Think wrestling a bear will earn you a place in local sporting history? Think again.

As far as Aurora's concerned, it's a matter of been there, done that ? and rather than getting the proverbial t-shirt, you can soon get a deck of cards to prove it.

Local historians, sports activists, and designers are eagerly anticipated the arrival of the full deck of 52 Pick-Me-Up, a full deck of 54 playing cards (including jokers) which was spearheaded as a fun way to celebrate Aurora's sports history in this, the Year of Sport, and, perhaps not coincidentally, be available to people looking for that unique and quirky holiday gift.

?It is all about the deep legacy of sport,? says Shawna White, Curator of the Aurora Museum and Archives, a partner on the project. ?It can show Aurorans things they didn't even know. It might be a quiet, small town but there were major athletes who did live here and do live here, and interesting things have been tied to sport almost from the very beginning to the current day.?

52 Pick-Me-Up is a collaboration between the Museum and Archives, the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame, Sport Aurora, Boulevard Design, and the Aurora Heritage Authority. (AHA)

The concept was toyed with in 2012 when the AHA's Chris Watts presented a similar idea to Aurora's Sesquicentennial Ad Hoc Committee which was tasked with planning the Town's 150th birthday the following year. While they did not pick up the concept, Mr. Watts did not keep it on the backburner for long. With the 2015 Pan American Games approaching, the idea was re-tooled to celebrate local sporting people, places and things.

?In the intervening years, we had the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame come on board, the Museum is now back, and I think that has allowed the project to expand and become a little bit richer,? says Mr. Watts. ?Knowing and seeing how the heritage and the history of Aurora is being presented in Town in very compact and more traditional places, what I wanted to do was get it in the hands of the people. I wanted to make that history live and I wanted it to be tactile.?

As a kid, Mr. Watts says he regularly hit local shops looking for O-Pee-Chee card packs looking to round out his collection showcasing hockey of the early 1980s. By the 90s, however, he saw the card market waning, but lately there has been something of a resurgence.

?That is great because it helps meld into the gamification of this,? he says. ?Taking and melding something that is just a collectable thing and making it into a playable card and fusing those together seemed like it would be a good fit ? and then it was a matter of can we find 52 things to put on cards?

“Of course we could. Luckily through a lot of expansive research there is no way it could all fit on the cards, so it has been a constant shuffling of who's in and who's out and how do we make a fair deck? I think we have done a good job because all the face cards end up being represented through the Sports Hall of Fame and it allows for a breadth of traditional sport. What I really like is finding the unconventional and really quirky sports, those off-the wall dates and people and just getting them out there.”

“The bear wrestling?” exclaims Ms. White with a laugh. “Come on!”

If you have been to any number of community events hosted by the Town of Aurora over the past year, you might have come across this bear wrestler, or any one of the first series of 16 cards that have been handed out along the way. Feedback so far on this initial run has been positive, they say “ and this is corroborated by designer Shawn Rasmussen of the Aurora-based Boulevard.

“I was introduced to Chris through a mutual friend and I thought the idea for the project sounded fantastic,” says Mr. Rasmussen. “We wanted to do something community-oriented and it seemed like a great opportunity. It had a certain fun factor we don't usually get with a lot of the projects we do, so we were on board from the very beginning.

“Being a resident of Aurora for about eight years, I am finding out more about its incredible history and there have been a lot of neat things I have discovered. It has been a lot of fun along the way.”

If you're patient with your fun, you will still be able to pick up individual cards free at various Town events through 2016, but if you want to get in on the fun all in one shot, or are looking for that unique Christmas gift, the full decks are slated to be available by the end of this week for \$15 and available for purchase at the Aurora Museum and Archives (22 Church Street), through Sport Aurora, and the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame.

Proceeds from sales will benefit these community partners.