

York Region athletes make grand entrance at Pan Am



By Jake Courtepatte

A dazzling Cirque du Soleil performance was the shining moment of the Pan Am Games opening ceremonies on Friday, a ceremony that followed through on a promise by games organizers to put on a more 'youthful' show for a younger generation of athletes.

Among the crowd was some of York Region's finest - King City's Rosie MacLennan, back to defend her Pan Am gold medal from the Games in Mexico four years ago, was among the favourites in the days leading up to the ceremonies to carry the Canadian flag. Although that honour went to canoer Mark Oldershaw, MacLennan was still ecstatic about the first-hand view of the ceremonies.

'They were unreal,' she said. 'The show they put on was incredible.'

MacLennan said the ceremony took an 'edgier' approach than the traditional International Olympic Committee show, and perhaps even topped the show she first witnessed in the 2012 Olympics in London.

From the beginning, it was clear the show was focused on the younger generation - it opened with a DJ spinning vinyl atop an elevated platform while hundreds of dancers choreographed a diverse dance hitting the cultural diversity of the city of Toronto.

'The GTA is just such a mixture of all different cultures, and when they're all recognized in one performance, it really plays to the diversity of the city,' said MacLennan.

The high-flying show was put into high gear by the Cirque du Soleil aerialists and a number of BMX cyclists to the tune of today's pop music and a flashy light show.

With the long-awaited Games declared open, Canada has taken to the podium quickly and often in the first week of competition.

MacLennan will be hitting the floor for competition on Saturday, with the medal rounds for trampoline coming on Sunday.

But so far, her favourite performance has been that of Ellie Black, a 19-year old who won gold in all-around gymnastics on Monday. 'I'm so proud of her,' said MacLennan.

Aurora's Carmen Whelan, only 16 years old, will put her rhythmic gymnastics routine to the test starting Friday. Joining MacLennan over the weekend in trampoline is veteran Karen Cockburn, as well as Nobleton's Jason Burnett. Aurora's Shaina Harrison, competing in the 4x100m relay, will be waiting until the final two days of competition to get her chance on July 24 and 25.

Schomberg's Eric Lamaze, the oldest competitor for Canada at the Games, will be competing at the Caledon Equestrian Park at the same time.

For more information about the Games, check out www.toronto2015.org.