

This relay was a truly special event

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Bad-news sports stories have been predominant of late. Auto racing has been plagued by accidents and fatalities.

The Kent Austin affair — Theme: "Why is everybody always picking on me?" — is a disaster of the quarterback's own making.

And the Leafs won. More bandwagon jumpers. More tedious, unimaginative hockey. More insipid Pat Burns interviews. Wonderful ...

Thankfully, the sporting world is not bereft of good news.

That was evident Saturday at the Saskatchewan Youth 10-Hour Relay, held at the RCMP Training Academy grounds.

Everyone had a *relay* good time. Not only that, the event raised approximately \$3,000 for Saskatchewan Special Olympics.

"To me, this is the reality of life," said volunteer Richie Hall, a former Saskatchewan Roughriders defensive halfback.

"Sports are important events — positive or negative — but, to me, those are TV things. These are reality things.

"Professional sports are a fantasy world, at least to me. Things of this nature happen every day. The Kent Austin thing will die away — hopefully! — but this will stay on. This is an annual thing. The Special Olympics will be here, year

Column



Rob Vanstone

in and year out. It's all very positive.

"This is a youth relay. There are no adults. The kids are special to be at this age and think of more than just themselves."

The rally attracted 12 teams of 10 runners, each of whom took turns running (or walking) a two-kilometre course over a 10-hour period. The participants ranged in age from 12 to 18.

"When you're young, you want to get into things more," said 13-year-old Paul O'Donnell, who attends St. Josaphat School. "When you're older, sometimes you're too cool to do things like this.

"At school, they said, 'If anybody wants to join, they can.' We got 10 people right away."

That was Friday. Within 24 hours, the team raised \$174. Better yet, nobody wanted to renegotiate. Special people appreciate such special efforts.

"We're pretty grateful," said 35-year-old Terry Livingstone, an elite Special Olympics athlete since 1978.

"A lot of schools are taking part in this. This will help to send us to the national Special Olympics in Halifax in July.

"It's a benefit for the people to get involved. That's what the program is all about."

Saturday was all about running. Running for a good cause. Running away from mosquitoes. Why doesn't city council ban these pests?

"They were bad," O'Donnell lamented. "I had to put mosquito spray on every half-hour. They still wouldn't leave you alone, especially during volleyball."

Volleyball was among the side-attractions. A trampoline was also popular. And let's not forget the video games.

Nintendo basketball featured Michael Jordan. Hold on. Isn't he a baseball player?

Nearby, two teenagers were enjoying George Foreman's K.O. Boxing. One mismatch pitted

Foreman against noted soup can Lorenzo (Bullet) Luciano. Foreman won. Luciano emerged with a third nostril.

Aside from Luciano, Saturday's principals were essentially healthy.

"One of the supervisors got hurt," volunteer Reide Baseden pointed out. "She was walking out of a trailer and she twisted her ankle. That's the only injury I heard of."

Sore feet were a problem by 8 p.m., when the relay concluded. But enthusiasm never waned as the day progressed.

"Here comes Ian!" one female runner bellowed as a weary teammate approached the finish line. "Let's do The Wave!"

Such spontaneity brightened Hall's omnipresent smile. "They may not be mighty in numbers, but they're mighty in spirit, enthusiasm and pride," said Hall, the Roughriders' defensive backfield coach. "They still have zest and they still want to have fun.

"I was at the opening ceremonies. When it came time to start the relay, they just took off. It looked like a 100-yard dash.

"I said, 'Slow down! You've still got 10 more hours of this!' They've got so much energy bottled up. It's great to see."

Especially in light of the times.