

An extra Special day among Olympians

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Column

Bottombys of our world are the best part of attending (or, in this instance, covering) Special Olympics.

There aren't any inhibitions or pretensions. Nobody speaks in orchestrated sound bites or in bureaucratese. Open dialogue is refreshing around election time.

Special Olympians are genuine.

Their actions, and reactions, reflect their sentiments. Words can never do them justice, but we shall try.

Watch a Special Olympian cross the finish line. The athlete can place first or 10th.

It doesn't matter. Everyone is smiling at the end.

You don't have to win to look like a champion.

"Winning and losing is not the main thing," said Marie Dionne of Weyburn, chairperson of the 1995 Saskatchewan Special Olympics. "They really don't care where they finish, as long as they've done their best.

"What makes it nice is that when you go to any competition, you meet athletes who you might have met years ago. They come and greet you and give you a hug.

"They never forget you. They're the greatest people to work with. If you make a friend, it's a friend for life."

Special Olympians are endearing. Some of their best friends happen to be famous.

"I'm a Winnipeg Jets fan," said Jason Chartrand, a 22-year-old Winnipegger who was among 10 guests from Manitoba. "Kris King is my

favorite player."

"Come here," interjected Laurie Plett, 17, of Steinbach,

Manitoba. "I like Teemu Selanne, too, but Kris King is the best," Chartrand continued. "At a Jets banquet, Kris King interviewed me at the podium. I told him to take over Don Wittman's job."

This triggered an outbreak of one-upmanship.

Plett: "I got Teemu Selanne to autograph my picture. Beat that."

Chartrand: "I was on the ice with the Jets. Beat that. I was in their dressing room. Beat that. I got free Winnipeg Blue Bombers tickets. Beat that."

A warm day at Special Olympics. Beat that!

Human nature dictates that, inevitably, we empathize with Special Olympians.

You wish that things could be better. Special Olympians manage to overlook any mental

and physical impediments. Sometimes, it isn't as easy for us.

"Feeling sorry for them is the worst thing you can do," Dionne said. "Even if you're sad, you try to bring out something on the sunny side of the issue."

Special Olympians always have sunny dispositions. Everyone should be as cheerful.

"You should have seen me cheer when Joe Carter hit that home run to win the '93 World Series," Bottomby remembered. "I was at my dad's house. I was crossing my fingers. When Joe Carter hit that home run, I was just ecstatic.

"Which baseball team do you cheer for, buddy?"

Montreal. Canada's team.

"The Expos?!" Bottomby concluded. "You've had some bad luck, buddy. Don't let it get you down."

WEYBURN — "Hi, buddy!"
With that salutation, Greg Bottomby — resplendent in track and field garb, plus a faded Toronto Blue Jays cap from the Otto Velez era — initiated a pleasant, wide-ranging discussion.

"I don't know why the Blue Jays are slumping," Bottomby said. "Maybe it's the pitching. If Cito Gaston could get the right pitchers, he might get the team on track."

Track is Bottomby's specialty.

He is a Special Olympian. "I like to treat people as they are," Bottomby, a 31-year-old Yorkton resident, said Saturday during the Saskatchewan Special Olympics at Weyburn Comprehensive High School.

"I don't like it when people say, 'You're not the same as we are.' That's just the way I feel sometimes."

Conversations with the Greg