

# Special Olympics missed opportunity for sports fans

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Amongst the abundant smiles at last weekend's Special Olympic Games, the occasional frown could be found.

Usually on the face of one of the organizers.

The cause for the displeasure?  
Poor public attendance.

From the beginning, organizers asked for the public's support, especially at the opening ceremonies. Their greatest wish was to see the stands at the opening ceremonies filled with people.

One of their disappointments?

Seeing the seats on the west side of the Agriplex barely half full on Friday night for the opening ceremonies.

The same problem also extended to the individual sporting events held Saturday at the Agriplex pool, Century Field, IGS Sports & Fitness Centre.

The poor attendance can't be put down to a lack of coverage or advertising for the event. The Yorkton Games have been called the "highest profile Special Olympics Games" in the history of the province.

Perhaps Special Olympics doesn't rate high on the list of spectator sports, but after spending a good portion of Saturday at the different venues, I have to wonder why.

The athletes were happy, a pleasure

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**Column**

to be around and a pleasure to watch compete. They cheered for each other, regardless of what zone they represented.

No boos, foul language or cries of "jinx" wafted through the summer air.

How different from a professional sporting event.

It didn't matter if an athlete crossed the finish line first or last, threw the ball or shot put 10 feet or two, the smiles at the end of the competition were always the same.

Filled with pride and accomplishment.

If an athlete had difficulties — say, passing a baton during the relay — no one got upset, instead they just cheered louder to encourage the athlete.

But many of Yorkton's citizens wouldn't know that.

They were too busy mowing the lawn,

shopping at the mall, watching World Cup soccer, to attend.

Even many of the dignitaries who took the time to attend the Games' opening ceremonies Friday night could not spare a few minutes of their busy day to attend the competitions.

But they were not alone

Several professional or celebrity athletes invited to participate in the Games either did not reply or did not reply until just before the event took place.

Would I have attended the Games if I hadn't been covering them? Yes.

Because during the past year I have had the opportunity to meet a number of the Zone 4 athletes.

I learned how important these Games are to the athletes and their friends. And I decided I wanted to attend the Games and support the Special Olympic athletes.

Life can get busy at times and prior commitments can interfere with best intentions.

But with every additional poorly attended event held in Yorkton, the city's reputation drops a notch lower.

And each time the phrase, "to get people out in Yorkton you have to have a free pancake breakfast," seems to become that much truer.

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