

Economist & Sun/Sun-Tribune

DIVERSIONS

Death of a Nation

All quiet in Leafland as playoff futility eclipses year 37

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

It's the death of a nation. The Leaf Nation, to be precise. And when things go quiet, they go really quiet. Only fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs can ride the roller-coaster of wins and losses to such broad emotional extremes, hanging on every detail of their beloved team until the very end.

Alas, that end arrived too soon once again for the diehards. Just as it has for what, 37 years straight now?

And when the Leafs exit the Stanley Cup playoff chase, The Nation not only falls into a state of mourning, it can be a life-altering occurrence as the faithful look for ways to cope until next year.

It is a certainty the Calgary Flames and Tampa Bay Lightning hardly carry the same cache, but for hockey fans they will have to suffice.

Suddenly, the pre-game rituals and superstitions are shoved aside as The Nation goes back to reality.

"You can tell by the state of my house the Leafs are out," said Sandra Turnsek, a Newmarket resident and die-hard Maple Leafs fan. "In fact, I think I'll get a fair bit of housework done now. For me, I'll be paying more attention to my family and house."

"I'll look in on the other teams but with not as much focus. I'd kind of like to see Calgary and Tampa Bay in the final."

In her home, the rest of the family has varying degrees of interest in the team but she serves as the soul of the Maple Leafs.

"They'll watch for a while and then go do their own things. They have other interests."

Unlike some fanatics, Mrs. Turnsek's pre-game rituals are hardly unusual.

Sure, she has the Leafs apparel



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Maple Leafs fan and Markville Shopping Centre's Fan Attic Collectables assistant manager Dave Walker sits amid a pile of unsold Leafs merchandise. Although the team showed a lot of heart in the playoffs, they were simply outmatched by the Philadelphia Flyers.

— the sweatshirt, T-shirt, pin and cap — but is not one of those who pulls on the stuff left side first or anything karma-like.

"You hear about those fans who don't go to the bathroom and the Leafs do well, so they won't go the next time, either. I guess everyone thinks they affect the outcome of a game."

"Basically, I just make sure dinner is out of the way and everyone else is out of my way. They clear the area because they know I do a lot of yelling."

But wasn't this supposed to be the Leafs' year?

"As usual, of course," Mrs. Turnsek said. "Every year, we think we'll win."

When the Leafs season ends, few businesses suffer like the watering holes where the faithful gather to root on their heroes with others of the same ilk.

Sharks? Flyers? Sorry, just doesn't cut it.

"The game is on, but nobody is interested in watching. People aren't coming in to watch the games," said Piero Occhiogrosso, manager at Archibald's

See BARS, page 24.

A Nation's history

Overall Playoff Record: 243-256-3
Stanley Cup Championships: 1966-67, 1963-64, 1962-63, 1961-62, 1950-51, 1948-49, 1947-48, 1946-47, 1944-45, 1941-42, 1931-32

2004 - lost to Philadelphia, 4-2, Eastern Conf. semifinal

2003 - lost to Philadelphia, 4-3, Eastern Conf. quarterfinal

2002 - lost to Carolina, 4-2, Eastern Conf. final

2001 - lost to New Jersey, 4-3, Eastern Conf. semifinal

2000 - lost to New Jersey, 4-2, Eastern Conf. semifinal

1999 - lost to Buffalo, 4-1, Eastern Conf. final

1996 - lost to St. Louis, 4-2, Western Conf. quarterfinal

1995 - lost to Chicago, 4-3, Western Conf. quarterfinal

1994 - lost to Vancouver, 4-1, Western Conf. final

1993 - lost to Los Angeles, 4-3, Western Conf. final

1990 - lost to St. Louis, 3-1, Norris Division semifinal

1988 - lost to Detroit, 4-2, Norris Division semifinal

1987 - lost to Detroit, 4-3, Norris Division final

1986 - lost to St. Louis, 4-3, Norris Division final

1983 - lost to Minnesota, 3-1, preliminary round

1981 - lost to NY Islanders, 3-0, preliminary round

1980 - lost to Minnesota, 3-0, preliminary round

1979 - lost to Montreal, 4-0, quarterfinal

1978 - lost to Montreal, 4-0, semifinal

1977 - lost to Philadelphia, 4-2, quarterfinal

1976 - lost to Philadelphia, 4-3, quarterfinal

1975 - lost to Philadelphia, 4-0, quarterfinal

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Sheryl Greenspan

Notes on a Napkin

Family-run restaurant 'bellissimo'

Mille Piatti

Location: 9929 Keele St., Maple

Phone: 905-303-0777

Type: Italian

Entrée Selection: Extensive

Price Range: \$8.95 to \$17.95

Hours: Closed Sunday

The name Mille Piatti literally translates to "1,000 plates" and this is what you'll find hanging on the walls of this lovely, family-run restaurant. Well, maybe not exactly 1,000 plates but that was the original intent, according to Adriano Stravino who, along with his uncle and chef Maurizio Buttinelli, co-own and run this delightful neighbourhood gem.

For the past 10 years, Mille Piatti has been a labour of love for the uncle/nephew team who hail from Rome. During the week, the place is quieter and getting a table is not usually a problem, but come the weekends, things pick up and reservations are recommended for Friday or Saturday nights.

The menu offers a tempting variety and the prices, considering the generous portions of what is, quite obviously, fresh, homemade fare, are far less than other local Italian bistros.

We started with an order of mussels steamed with onions, garlic, tomatoes and white wine (\$7.25). The bowl was overflowing and the mussels were large and perfectly prepared. There are several traditional Italian salads, including caprese (\$7.95) — fresh tomato with bocconcini cheese and basil and the peren-

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Child: \$12

Jan. 30, 2005
11 a.m. & 2 p.m.

Adult: \$18
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