

BROCK'S BANTER: At the epicentre of grief

By Brock Weir

How can you find a focus for your grief when it hits so close to home?

Sadly, this is something we are now experiencing far too often.

In the aftermath of the tragic April 6 bus crash, which killed 16 members of the Humboldt Broncos hockey family, leaving 13 others injured, reaction was swift.

People from across the country, many of whom had never heard of the small Saskatchewan town outside of hockey circles, were suddenly all too aware, finding immediate identification with the community for whom hockey was its beating heart.

Neighbourhoods from Vancouver to St. John's were united, donning their own hockey jerseys, or their best green and gold, in tribute to the team. Moments of silence were held. Hockey sticks were left out in the cold, many illuminated only by a dim porch light in solidarity the victims and the families impacted by the tragedy. A record amount of money was collected to aid Humboldt and the loved ones of each individual hit hard.

Canada showed an incredible and admirable degree of unity, putting aside partisan differences to be that symbol of strength so desperately needed in the occasion.

Those movements ? the jerseys, the green and gold, the hockey sticks, the donations ? provided a useful way for Canadians to channel their grief, sadness and anger; emotions which, thankfully, we experience so rarely as a nation compared to other parts around the world.

But, we showed these feelings several provinces away from the community hardest hit by the tragedy. Focus was probably much different at the epicentre of the grief, something that would be incomprehensible to most of us who, once the wardrobe was changed, the donation made, the hockey sticks placed, continued to band together using the hashtag #humboldtstrong.

Now, following the tragic events on Monday afternoon, an attack on Toronto streets all too close to home, we're now at an epicentre of our own.

As we're now all too aware, 10 men and women were killed, with a further 15 injured, by a Richmond Hill van driver as they innocently went about their business.

The stories of each of the victims have not yet surfaced, but it is not difficult to imagine that some of them might have been on their lunch hour, taking a break from a nearby office tower, making their way to or from school, going out to grab some groceries, or maybe even going to pick up their kids. These stories will emerge in the coming days.

They could have been any one of us, and perhaps that has added further sting to an already unthinkable situation.

?I thank the first responders at the scene who managed this extremely difficult situation with courage and professionalism,? said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a statement that evening. ?They faced danger without hesitation, and their efforts no doubt saved lives and prevented further injuries.

?We should all feel safe walking in our cities and communities.?

Added Mayor John Tory before the tenth victim succumbed to her injuries later on Monday: ?My heart goes out to the families and loved ones of the nine people killed and 16 injured in today's cowardly and incomprehensive attack in Toronto. Our city denounces this and all acts of violence and we are united in our grief over this devastating loss.

?I encourage the people of Toronto to come together in support of those affected by this tragedy and those working to keep us safe ? in particular to help the police by providing information. I ask everyone to await results of the police investigation to avoid speculation. Instead, we should show the world that Toronto is a city that will not be cowed, will not be afraid and will not waver in the values we hold dear.?

Powerful words.

In just a few minutes on Monday afternoon, as the Prime Minister put it, ?walking in our cities and communities? has somehow become an act of defiance.

By doing so, people not just in Toronto but throughout the extended GTA, will follow Mayor Tory's call to ?show the world that Toronto is a city that will not be cowed, will not be afraid, and will not waver in the values? it holds dear.

But who could have conceived that we would ever be at this point?

Over the next few days, people in communities like this, still in a comfortable, or perhaps uncomfortable, radius to the City of Toronto, will express their feelings in many ways.

For some, it might be heading into the city for a simple walk down the street, but other examples of individuals refusing to be cowed

will emerge, each steeling our resolve not to waver in our respective values, whatever these values might be. We're all too close to the tragedy. Donning the blue and white of the Leafs, the red and black of the Raps, or a Jays hat in solidarity might seem trivial to us, as might becoming our own hashtag in #torontostrong, but this is likely how the rest of the country might respond.

Here at home, however, there is no clear way to channel our own grief.

Over the next few days, we are likely to see public memorials held in honour of the victims. Makeshift memorials have already popped up near Finch Station, just a stone's throw from where this rampage began. However an outlet for grief manifests itself, there is no doubt our collective steely backbone will be more than evident.

Given the recent outpouring to our brothers and sisters in Humboldt, it might seem strange, surreal, almost foreign, to be on the receiving end of a further outpouring, but here we are.

April began with a tragedy that cut close to the bone of every Canadian, summoning strength from our deep, collective reserves in the process. Thankfully this strength and resolve was still close to the surface when tragedy, sadly, came knocking on our door once again.