

NIAGARA 2021 GAMES GETS ONE SHELL OF A BAD MASCOT

A TURTLE IS NOT A GOOD ATHLETIC MASCOT, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC
Column

Between major sports, college teams, and high school clubs, there are dozens of different teams with a panther as their mascot. Because panthers are cool. Panthers are sleek, speedy, and exotic. They are apex predators. That's why so many teams have chosen the mighty panther to represent them.

But the turtle? What an absolute turd of a mascot. There is a reason that literally no sports franchise has a turtle mascot. And yet, despite evidence that turtles are the Hitler of the animal kingdom (just look at ol' Yertle), a turtle has been named the official

mascot of the Niagara 2021 Canada Summer Games.

The games are meant to showcase elite athletes pushing the boundaries of the physical capabilities of humans at the highest levels of sport, and we chose a mascot animal who is most famous for being slow, plodding, and low-energy?

A turtle is the very antithesis of what the games represent. A turtle is a lackadaisical animal whose commitment to being slow is matched only by the leisurely sloth. A turtle is a bad mascot.

Now, it's probably worth noting that this mascot abomination was chosen and designed by a local kid. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt and assume his original design was decent.

But whoever was in charge of translating this kid's art into a full costume mascot deserves to be fired... into the sun.

This thing was unveiled over the weekend and, woof, it's pretty bad. The kid who drew the original said he was inspired by the

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, who are the only cool turtles to have ever existed in all of turtle history.

But something has been lost in translation. The design of this hideous mascot looks like someone smashed all their fingers with a hammer and then said, 'Alright, now I'm going to make a sorta Ninja Turtle costume.' It looks like one of those bad costumes you get at Halloween where the company didn't have the rights to the character so instead of Super Mario, it's like, Game Plumber Jumpman and his trademark red overalls are blue instead.

Why are the Canada Summer Games outsourcing our mascot design to a buncha kids (and subsequently the world's worst costume designer) in the first place? We're spending millions and millions of dollars on the games, but you're telling me there was no money left in the budget to make a mascot costume that isn't hopelessly embarrassing? It reeks of the kinda cheap crowdsourcing

that Niagara is notorious for, like when Welland needed a new city logo but didn't wanna hire a graphic designer so they held a contest (aka an opportunity to exploit free labour) and asked people to design the logo in exchange for a crummy gift card.

Costume issues aside, the mascot has a terrible name also. Shelly? Get it, like because turtles have shells. If there was an award for the most ham-fisted forced pun, Shelly the turtle would be a contender.

While the bad name and awful costume are certainly contributing factors to making this a bad choice for the Niagara 2021 Games mascot, the real kicker for me is the seedy subtext of selecting a turtle to be the mascot for Niagara.

As anyone who has followed the news over the past few years would already know, turtles are the worst. The presence of "rare" turtle species has caused no small order of problems throughout the Niagara peninsula.

From waterfront condo towers in Fort Erie, to the massive billion-dollar Paradise project in Niagara Falls, turtles have consistently been a thorn in the side of any developer looking to build something that might boost the local economy. By making the games mascot a turtle, Niagara is basically saying: we hate jobs and investment.

Usually, I like to try and pepper in some cool facts about whatever thing I'm writing about each week, but as you'll notice, there are zero cool turtle facts in this column. Because turtles don't do anything cool or noteworthy.

The most interesting thing I found about turtles is that there's one species called the Fitzroy River turtle, and it breathes through its bum. That's basically a backwards fart; which is a pretty good way to describe Shelly the Niagara 2021 Summer Games mascot turtle.

James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist, and his cat Zelda should be the games mascot. Email him at jculic@niagarathisweek.com or holler on Twitter @jamesculic

LETTERS

ST. CATHARINES DOESN'T NEED TO BEG FOR DEVELOPMENT

Re: Council won't re-debate tax rebate for condo project, Nov. 5

Though the motion at Nov. 4 St. Catharines council meeting to reopen consideration of a tax break for the Harbour Club development in Port Dalhousie was ultimately defeated, there were emotional and convincing speeches on both sides.

However, one recurring argument deserves closer attention: by

declining the developer's application for a \$3.4-million rebate under the community incentives program (CIP) the city might frighten off other potential developers.

The real estate and development climate in St Catharines has changed dramatically since the CIP was last amended in 2014. But it seems many residents - and some councillors - still labour under the conviction St. Catharines

is a post-industrial backwater desperate for any development at any cost.

In 2016, my wife and I looked all over Ontario for a community in which we wished to settle. We chose St. Catharines for all it has to offer, which developers are waking up to.

The days of begging for development of any sort are over. The era of managing development to

ensure maximum community benefit that respects our environmental, economic and social priorities has arrived.

DON SAWYER
ST. CATHARINES

VANDALISM DEMONSTRATES INTOLERANCE

Re. Right to life Centre vandalized Nov. 8:

The attack on a St Catharines "Right to life Centre" shows again the intolerance and hate certain

people show to others with a different view.

The Trudeau Liberals, the political left and the media are preaching inclusiveness and tolerance for all in Canada, but are not willing to extend the same courtesy to others with different opinions.

This is an assault on our freedom of speech, our freedom of expression, our freedom of religion and our democracy.

ROB JANSSEN
LINCOLN



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Don't Leave Your Most Important Contract To Chance

The purchase or sale of your property is likely the most important and expensive contract you will ever sign.

Leaving the review of those contract details to chance, could be a very costly and time-consuming mistake.

The legal real estate team at LBW, can review those details to ensure your best interests are protected.



HOW JAPAN LIFTED THE LID ON MY VIEWS OF TOILETS

READJUSTING TO A LOW-TECH LIFE IN CANADA HAS BEEN HARD, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC
Column

For a few seconds I just stood there over the toilet, looking down, and waiting for the seat to automatically lift, or the self-cleaner to activate, or the soothing sounds of a waterfall to begin playing from its speaker.

But it didn't do any of that stuff. Instead, it just sat there like the big dumb pile of porcelain that it was, because I was back in Canada, and the toilets here don't do anything cool. Upon returning from my vacation in Japan last week, toilet disappointment set in immediately after getting off the plane. I disembarked, went to the bathroom, and was instantly let down by how stupid and antiquated our toilets were.

In addition to the nasty low-tech toilet, the bathroom at Pearson Airport was also something that I had not experienced in the past 14 days in Japan; it was dirty. It was all gross and garbage was overflowing in the bin and the sink was dingy and the soap was watered-down.

In Japan, you can be at a weird little bar underneath the train tracks that is staffed by a single old man on a Saturday night in Tokyo, walk down some tiny stairs to the basement bathroom stall, only to find that it's cleaner than the cleanest bathroom you'd find in the fanciest place in Canada.

And when you're done with your business, it shoots some refreshing water up at your nether regions, cleans the inside of the bowl, then closes the lid, all automatically through sensors and, like, lasers or something.

For whatever reason, bathroom technology in this country has stagnated. Canadian bathrooms have remained unchanged for decades, and having been to the land of the rising toilet lid, I gotta say it's a shame we are still using the same bathroom technology that our grandparents used.



James Culic/Torstar

There are thousands of bikes all over Tokyo, and none of them are locked, because apparently, no one steals bikes in Japan.

We don't innovate in this country anymore. We like to pretend we do, but in North America, to 'innovate' these days just means 'we made an app for a thing' but that's about it.

Meanwhile, Japan is still rocketing forward with all manner of innovation. Did you know that their bathroom mirrors don't fog up over the sink? I'm not sure what kinda witchcraft is involved, but after a long hot shower, the bathroom mirror will be all foggy, except for this one part directly over the sink where you need to look, so you can still shave and whatever without having to squeegee the whole mirror. It's

pretty great.

I've spent a lot of this column talking about toilets and how Japanese bathrooms are better than ours, so I should probably move on to talking about the fact that it's not just the toilet-tech that is better in Japan, it is, literally, everything.

Every single thing is better in Japan. I've been home for just over a week now, and have been trying to think of one singular thing that is better in Canada than in Japan, and all I've got so far is that I prefer milk in bags rather than cartons.

The biggest difference seems to be that people over there care about their communities more, and follow the general rules of public decorum which make their communities better.

For instance, my wife and I were constantly amazed at how many people bike around Tokyo, and just leave their bikes outside or in a parking lot for bikes, but no one steals them. We walked past this one giant bicycle parking lot right in downtown Tokyo that must have had a hundred bikes just sitting there, and yet, not a single one of them had any kind of bike lock. We watched over and over as people would bike up to a restaurant or shop, hop off their

bike, and go inside, without a single care or thought that someone might steal their bike. Instead, people just ... don't steal bikes; crazy concept I know.

People also don't smoke outside in Tokyo. There are signs all over the place saying you can't smoke on the sidewalks, and again, people just follow the rules. No one smokes outside. We never saw any officers enforcing this rule. It's just a rule, so people follow it.

We also didn't see any garbage, any graffiti, or any homeless, despite the fact that our hotel was right in downtown Akihabara, one of the busiest districts in one of the biggest urbanized cities on the planet.

At no point did we ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe during our entire stay in Japan. Well, except for that one time where we inadvertently spent the night drinking beers with a bunch of Yakuza, but that's another story for another time.

James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist, until he convinces his wife to move to Japan, then he's outta here. Email him at jculic@niagarathisweek.com or holler on Twitter @jamesculic

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

PEACOCK POINT RESIDENTS SAY THANKS

What governments — both federal and provincial — have done thus far to help citizens/businesses is a good start, but doesn't go far enough.

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced citizens shouldn't have to worry about paying rent during this time of

crisis I breathed a sigh of relief. Since then nothing seems to have been done to show that private citizens or business owners who are also tenants have nothing to worry about.

To be sure, Premier Doug Ford has restricted evictions during this crisis, but who's to say land-

lords won't evict tenants down the road because they missed rent during the COVID-19 pandemic?

My partner and I have decided food and other necessities take priority over rent this month and possibly next. We are hoping our landlords understand our situation but there are no guarantees they will respond appropriately.

It's a very stressful time for all

those involved in the rental industry (tenants, landlords, and their rental managers). Having additional stress during an already stressful period of history will only serve to make matters worse.

Loans are available to small business owners to keep their businesses from going under, why not landlords? I'm not asking that rent be cancelled. Mort-

gages are being deferred so it feels like the only folks getting help are those who own homes and people who cannot afford to own are being discriminated against.

For many tenants April 1 and the days leading up to it will be unbearably stressful.

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BRADLEY SHEA
WELLAND



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TURNS OUT PICKLEBALL'S NOT SO BAD, IF YOU'RE AWESOME AT IT

AFTER MOCKING IT FOR YEARS, TURNS OUT PICKLEBALL IS KINDA FUN, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC
Column

There are two types of people who play pickleball: Old ladies with grey hair and even older dudes with no hair.

I'm kidding. I shouldn't say that. I should be nicer in 2020, that's my goal. My other goal is to actually take a deeper look at some of the things I've mocked, ridiculed, belittled and otherwise made the butt of my jokes over the past few years.

Like pickleball, for example. Pickleball has been one of my fre-

quent punching bags and I've made it the punchline to more than a few of my columns. So when a few guys from the gym recently invited me out for a swing with their crew after learning I'd never actually played a game of pickleball, I went for it.

Arriving at the court on Wednesday, it was blatantly obvious that I am not the typical pickleball player; mostly because I wasn't born before or immediately after one of the world wars. I was likely the youngest person there by a good 30 years.

For context, one of the dudes there was Russ Rosetani, my mom's school teacher when she was in Grade 5. Russ is a very good



James Culic/Torstar

Pickleball is particularly popular in Port Colborne.

dude, and he gave me a bunch of great tips and advice before I made my big pickleball debut.

However, as it turns out I didn't need any tips or advice because like everything else I do, I am amazing at pickleball. I am a perfect pickleball player; literally, I am undefeated.

Before I continue bragging, I should maybe explain what pick-

leball is, since anyone under the age of 40 reading this probably has no idea what I'm talking about. Pickleball is a soft-blend smoothie of all the different racquet sports; it's got a net similar to tennis, a court about the same dimensions as badminton, and a racquet that looks like an oversized ping-pong paddle. The biggest difference between pickleball and other racquet sports is the ball itself, which is a large, forgiving wiffle ball looking thing that wafts gently through the air, even when hit with a powerful smash.

The gameplay is like squash or tennis, but on easy mode. Lots of the people I met while playing - and there were lots, more than a dozen people were there for a random pickup game on New Year's Day at the Fort Erie YMCA - told me they specifically liked the game because it was low-impact and easy on their joints. A few guys even told me they were former squash players who switched to pickleball because it's more senior-friendly. There's also a big social aspect to pickleball. Sever-

al players told me they come out everyday for a knockaround on the pickleball court because it's just a fun way to socialize.

The other thing about pickleball is that it is uproariously popular at the moment. Courts in Port Colborne and Fort Erie are in a perpetual state of full capacity. One player from Fort Erie told me he winters in Florida at a seniors resort that has 72 pickleball courts and they are in full-use from 8 a.m. until sundown.

And as much as I have poked fun at pickleball over the years, after playing a handful of matches (and winning all of them) I do understand the appeal of the game.

It seems to be as much about chilling with your buddies as it does about playing the actual game. It's sort of like golf without the pretension and the day-drinking.

James Culic is Niagara This Week's regular weekly columnist and he will play pickleball again if they let him. Email him at jculic@niagarathisweek.com or holler on Twitter @jamesculic

LETTERS & COMMENTARY

BLAME LIES WITH PLANNING POLICIES

Re. Eat the rich or at least steal their empty homes, Column, Jan. 2:

Whilst I totally agree with the James Culic's conclusion that a few rich folks, and developers, are getting richer off the housing boom whilst homes become more and more unaffordable for the many, he is ignoring those who are really to blame.

How many stories have appeared in this newspaper about elected councilors choosing more and more developments in their

constituencies against the wishes of many of their own electorate? Even worse, those same councilors offer tax breaks to those same developers to encourage them to build.

Those doing the most damage are actually neither developers nor elected politicians, but planning staff who recommend such development, knowing that the elected councils are too scared of their staff to oppose such recommendations in almost every case.

Perhaps you could take time to study a couple of Official Plans and Zoning Bylaws. Planners use the concept of 'Minor Variances' and 'Special Exceptions' to bypass any and all planning policies that may stop them from pressuring their councils to approve whatever they recommend. And if worst comes to worst they just ignore any policies that don't fit.

ANDREW WATTS
WAINFLEET

PLOW, DON'T SAND ROADS

Inefficient snow removal on

Virginia Street in Welland wastes taxpayers money when sanding this street.

Since the last snowfall on December 11, Virginia Street, as usual, wasn't plowed within 24 hours, the time the city states on its website that snow will be removed by the public works department.

Instead Virginia Street was sanded on Dec. 12 and Dec. 17 when it had snowed again. Wouldn't it be more economical to plow the snow off the street instead of sanding it?

When traffic passes on the street this leaves tire tracks that then freeze, making driving diffi-

cult because of the frozen ruts left behind. And sanding the street doesn't help one bit to eliminate this problem for the residents. Sanding instead of plowing only adds to the problem of not having the street plowed in a timely fashion. All it accomplishes is wasting taxpayers' money.

Why can't the city plow Virginia Street? It takes the same amount of time, doesn't waste the sand and makes it easier for the residents to drive on it after it snows.

CHARLES OWEN
WELLAND



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