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COUNTRY MUSIC WEEK: AWARDS SHOW AT BUDWEISER GARDENS DRAWS STARS, FANS

And then there were eight.

The CCMA Awards show Sunday at Budweiser Gardens left eight major awards to be handed out as Country Music Week peaked with a big concert at Budweiser Gardens.

With London Rio Olympian Damian Warner and other celebs on hand, still to be announced early Sunday were Album Of the Year, Fans' Choice, Female Artist of the Year, Group or Duo of the Year, Male Artist of the Year, Rising Star, Single of the Year and CMT Video.

Also set to present CCMA Awards on the CBC-TV broadcast were George Canyon, nominated for Album of the Year and Record Producer(s) of the Year; Kira Isabella, nominated for Female Artist of the Year; and Wes Mack, nominated for Album of the Year.

Also set to take to the stage and present Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame inductee, Murray McLauchlan, one of the few stars to play Centennial Hall on a Friday (with CCMA Legends show) and Budweiser Gardens on the following Sunday.

Also to present were Songwriter(s) of the Year nominee, Meghan Patrick; Group or Duo of the Year nominees, The Road Hammers and first-time nominees in four award categories this year, The Washboard Union. Rounding out the Canadian artists presenting on the awards show are Bobby Wills, who is up for Album of the Year, Single of the Year and Songwriters of the Year, as well as multi-CCMA Award winner and member of the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame, Merlin-raised Michelle Wright.

The show started Sunday at 7 p.m. with Niagara Falls star Tim Hicks singing his hit, Stompin Ground – which had the right “hometown proud” lyrics for the occasion.

The show is billed as the first such live music awards show to be broadcast from the downtown London arena. The CCMA's Country Music Week is a first on this scale for London as a host city.

Host Jessie Cruickshank followed Hicks saying she could not wait "to objectify Sam Hunt" -- a U.S. star to perform later -- like her "10,000 horny sisters" in the house.

She later smooched passionately with a Canadian star Chad Brownlee during a Kiss Cam segment, which must have been set up.

But as the host said, what happens in London, Ontario, stays in London, Ontario. So maybe Hunt won't mind where that kiss was bestowed.

Sunday's first big winner was Alberta's Brett Kissel, who won male artist of the year.

"London, this is amazing . . . I've always dreamed about being up here on this stage and holding this award," Kissel told the fans.

Londoners might remember he played the 2014 Memorial Cup beer tent just outside the arena where he took home that prize on Sunday.

Saskatchewan star Jess Moskaluke three-peated as Female Artist of the Year.

"This is incredible. Every time this happens, I'm in disbelief," she told fans. She wanted to support Canadian women in country music.

"I do want to thank the women who have blazed a trail for all of us," she said.

Two of those women -- Terri Clark, who lived briefly in London, and Merlin-raised Michelle Wright -- were to be part of the show later.

Just a year after the Vancouver band showed up at the 2015 CCMA Awards as a surprise, Vancouver's Washboard Union won the Rising Star award.

One of the night's biggest cheers went to Warner, who introduced Chad Brownlee with help from fellow Rio Olympian Melissa Bishop of Windsor.

Brownlee's performance had a local angle.

Dancing with the star and his band was London's Kimberly O'Neill-Delguercio who looked even hotter than the pyro effects.

Gord Bamford's Tin Roof was album of the year.

"Thanks for Jack Daniel's for sponsoring this -- my favourite whiskey of choice," the Alberta star said.

Bamford might have added a London Knights reference -- but he had London love for the thousands of fans in the arena and across Canada.

"It's the greatest country in the world (with) the great country music fans in the world," Bamford said.