

THE FIRST CANADIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

by Bob Sproule

With the formation of the Canadian Rugby Football Union in 1882 as the ruling body of rugby, it was only a matter of time before there was a true national champion. Both the Quebec and Ontario Football Unions were formed the next year. Then in 1884 a match took place between the Argonauts of Toronto, winners of the Ontario R.F.U., and the Montreal Football Club, winners of the Quebec Union.

The game took place at the University Lawns, Toronto, the afternoon of Wednesday, November 5, Thanksgiving Day. A crowd of some 450 people gathered to watch under partly cloudy skies. R.M. Bankier was the referee and his umpire was George Blaiklock.

Campbell, the Montreal captain, won the toss and elected to guard the University side of the field because of a strong breeze in his favour. At 3:23 p.m., MacLennan of Toronto started the match with a good kickoff. It was returned by the Montreal backs towards centre field. By a series of good scrimmages and slips on the part of the Argos, Montrealers were able to run the ball into enemy territory. After some more quick and exciting plays, Stirling was able to kick a rouge, and the first point of the game went to Montreal.

From the kickout, the ball was quickly returned by Montreal well into their opponents' goal area. Then, from a scrum the oval was passed out by Miller to Drummond, who by a clever run placed it over the line. The kick, a long and difficult one, was tried but it failed to go through the posts. The score read Montreal 5, Toronto 0.

After the kickoff, the Argonauts, lead by Blake, confined the game to a hard-fought series of scrimmages that moved up the field but failed to result in any kind of score. Indeed, the reputation of the Argonaut forwards was well deserved, as they did more than their share in containing the speedier Montreal wingline. Although the visitors, dressed in their well-known red and black, were the heavier team, the Torontos played even with them.

However, the Argos, dressed in maroon contoured jerseys and stockings, gave ground and Montreal gained several good yards by running the ball through or around the wingline. The home team contested the speed of the ball being put into play, claiming that at times it was snapped out rather than being heeled, as required by the rules in force. The matter was finally settled to Blake's satisfaction by the game officials.

Still, there was a great deal of handling of the ball in the scrimmages on both sides. But as play was fairly divided, there were very few appeals to the referee.

After some exciting plays around centre field, the ball was slowly moved towards the Toronto goal. From a scrum, George Cains got away with the pigskin and when surrounded he passed to Cleghorn. Cleghorn covered the remaining distance and planted the ball behind the posts. The goal from the try by ruling was successful, and in the span of some twenty-five minutes Montreal had built a commanding lead – 13 to 0.

The Argonauts put up a stiff fight. Thomas, an old McGill and Montreal player, along with Blake, Van Koughnet, Cameron and the other forwards, played hard for their side. MacLennan did some excellent kicking, but before halftime was called, the swift Montreal backs carried the ball well into Argo territory and the Argonauts were forced to rouge on Stirling's long kick. At the end of the first forty-five minutes the score stood 14-0 in favor of the Red and Black.

At the second-half whistle, the teams formed immediately and Hodgson kicked off at 4:14 p.m. Toronto now played at the University side of the field, but the wind that had aided Montreal in the first half had fallen off. But no matter: the Argo players were determined and played a true and firm game. Slowly they gained ground with their strong runs and kicking game and finally pushed Montreal past centre field. Soon the home club was near the quarter line and a score looked possible, but the heavier Montreal line took control. Over a series of scrimmages, Montreal eventually regained the lost ground. The ball was worked up the side with great skill, and shortly it was but a few feet from the goalline. Stirling got the ball and was over before Toronto had time to react. The kick by Hodgson from near the sidelines failed to

score, but Montreal's lead was increased to 18 points.

Although MacLennan was able to make some good long gains, Toronto was mainly kept on the defensive. When forced to kick, Miller of the visitors made remarkable returns to good advantage. Some dangerous loose kicking by the Argos in front of their goal allowed Drummond to make a fair catch. Then the kick by Campbell sent the ball near the post but failed to score. One of the Toronto backs tried to save a point by kicking the oval out of danger, but it struck one of the uprights and Stirling was quick on the ball for a fumble return and another score. The goal, also by Stirling, gave Montreal another four points and the score read 26-0.

No sooner had Toronto received the ball and kicked it away, then Drummond at quarterback took the sphere and weaved his way past at least a half dozen Toronto men and placed the ball neatly by the post. The kick, from a difficult angle, failed to score.

From then on there was little movement of the ball, but just before time was called the Argos managed to dribble a loose ball near the Montreal goal. However, it was to no avail: there they were stopped short in the scrimmages and finally by the referee's whistle.

Full time was called at 5:00 p.m., with Montreal winning the first championship of the C.R.F.U. by the respectable score of 30 to 0. Such control of the scrimmages between the two teams, the movement of the wingline, and the kicking, as well as the fleet passing of the ball from player to player must be attributed largely to the excellent condition and sharp play of the Montreal players. The Toronto men were no doubt taken by surprise and were given a demonstration of perfect coordination of forward to quarterback to halfback.

The first Canadian football championship had been played and a winner clearly established, but within a few years the C.R.F.U. itself would cease to exist. The problem over rules for the title games between the two provinces was the cause.

TOR. ARGONAUT F.C.

MONTREAL F.C.

MacLennan	.....	B	.....	Hodgson
MacFarlane	.....	B	.....	Fry
Aldwell	.....	HB	.....	Drummond
Muntz	.....	HB	.....	Abbott
Murphy	.....	QB	.....	Miller
Torrance	.....	QB	.....	Stirling
Blake (Capt.)	.....	F	.....	R.Campbell (Capt.)
McCallum	.....	F	.....	A. Cairns
Thomas	.....	P	.....	G. Cains
Van Koughnet	.....	F	.....	P. Louson
McAndrew	.....	F	.....	Cleghorn
Marsh	.....	F	.....	Fuitop
Armstrong	.....	P	.....	Rogers
Cameron	.....	F	.....	Barton
Boyd	.....	F	.....	A. Campbell

Referee: R.M. Bankier

Umpire: George Blaiklock

Temperature: 33 F.

Winds: NW 18 m.p.h.

Field: Dry

Atmosphere: Partly cloudy

First Half

Mtl, rouge (by kick), Stirling

Mtl, try (by run), Drummond

Mtl, try (by run), Cleghorn

Mtl, goal from try (by kick), Stirling

Mtl, rouge (by kick), Stirling

Montreal 14, Toronto 0

Second Half

Mtl, try (by run), Stirling

Mtl, try (by fumble return), Stirling

Mtl, goal from try (by kick), Stirling

Mtl, try (by run), Drummond

Montreal 30, Toronto 0