

Canadian Football: Past To Present

by Bob Sproule

Here is a brief look at some highlights in 128 years of Canadian football:

1861- November 9, first documented football game was played at the University of Toronto on the present site of University College (400 yards west of Queens's Park). One of the participants in the game involving University of Toronto students was William Mulock, later it's Chancellor.

1868- First written account of a football game played in Quebec was by R. Tait Mackenzie. It was between a team of officers from the English troops garrisoned in Montreal and a team of civilians, mainly from McGill University.

1869- The Hamilton Tigers Football Club was formed.

1870- The Hamilton-Toronto rivalry was born when the two cities met in a 15-man per side "refined rugby game."

????- The Montreal Football Club was formed.

1872- The first game played in Quebec occurred when the Montreal Football Club played Quebec City to a scoreless tie.

1873- The Toronto Argonaut Rowing Club formed the Toronto Argonauts in September and played its first game against the University of Toronto on October 4.

1874- The rules of a hybrid game of English rugby devised by the University of McGill were first used in the United States in a game at Boston between McGill and Harvard. On May 14, Harvard won 3-0 using Harvard rules. The next day, the teams tied 0-0 while playing Canadian rules. Harvard liked the new game so much they introduced it into the Ivy League. Both U.S. and Canadian football evolved from these games.

1875- The first inter-provincial game was played between Ontario and Quebec.

1876- The Ottawa Football Club was formed and played the Aylmer Club at Jacques Cartier Square on Saturday, September 23. Both sides scored a Try. (Sir) Percy Serwood kicked a Goal from a Try for the winning point.

1877- The Ottawa and Britannia Football Club of Montreal played their first game. Montreal won 3-0.

1879- The University of Michigan played a game against the University of Toronto. The Winnipeg Football Club was formed.

1880- The "Open Formation" was introduced for the first time. Both teams were required to lineup across from each other.

1883- The Ontario Rugby Football Union was formed on January 6; 10 days later the Quebec Rugby Football Union was formed. The ORFU played a Tie Schedule with teams of 15 men per side. Three divisions were formed in the ORFU. Referees were used for all games. A point scoring system was put into place with 6 points for a goal from the Field (field goal); 4 points for a Try (touchdown), Goals from a Try, Penalties and Free Kicks; 2 points for Safety Touches; and 1 point for Kicks to the Deadline, Rouges and Touch in Goals. The Quebec Union adopted a Challenge Schedule with Scoring by Goals and Trys. Ottawa Amateur Athletic Association Football Club was formed and the Toronto Argonauts defeated the Ottawa AAA 9-7 in the first ORFU Championship on November 10.

1884- The Canadian Rugby Football Union was formed on February 7 and used the ORFU and New English Rugby union Rules to form the Code of Rules for Canadian football. The QRFU adopted the

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 13, No. 1 (1991)

ORFU system of scoring and the Tie Schedule. The Montreal Football Club (QFRU) defeated the Toronto Argonauts (ORFU) 30-0 on November 6 in the first CRFU Championship game.

1885- The ORFU divided into City and College groups. The CRFU stated that the playing field should be as close to 100 yards in length as practical by 65 yards wide. A combined team from the Montreal and Britannia Football Clubs (QRFU) defeated an Ontario Combined Team (ORFU) 3-0 on November 12 in the CRFU Championship game. The CRFU ruled the game was a draw because the Montreal team did not score 4 points.

1886- The CRFU ruled that a quarterback could run or kick the ball only after the defenders had pushed the ball through the scrimmage. The ORFU objected to the CRFU rules and refused to participate. There was no championship game.

1887-The ORFU withdrew from the CRFU and the governing body ceased to function. The ORFU adopted "heeling" the ball as a method of putting it into play. They also began using a 5-man scrimmage. Goals from the Field were reduced to 5 points. At the end of the season, team executive members arranged a Dominion Championship game at McGill University in which Ottawa College (ORFU) defeated the Montreal Football Club (QRFU) 10-5 on November 5.

1888- ORFU aligned into one unit and competed in a Challenge Schedule. Penalty Kicks were lowered in value to 2 points. Hamilton Tigers introduced the 3-man scrimmage. ORFU and QRFU executives arranged a Dominion Championship at Ottawa. Ottawa College (ORFU) and the Montreal Football Club played to a scoreless tie. This was the last title match until 1892. Winnipeg Football Club, St. John's College and the Royal School of Infantry formed the Manitoba Rugby League.

1889- ORFU lowered the value of a Goal from Field to 5 points. Intercollegiate teams used a 2-point Goal from a Try. The QRFU adopted a Challenge Schedule.

1890- ORFU returned to the Tie Schedule. All teams adopted the 2-point Goal from a Try. QRFU adopted the 3- man scrimmage. First game in Alberta, as Edmonton and Clover Bar played to a scoreless tie. In October, Regina North West Mounted Police played the Winnipeg Football Club twice in Winnipeg with each side winning once.

1891- At a meeting of delegates of the Quebec and Ontario Rugby Unions at the Windsor Hotel in Montreal on December 19, 1891, the Canadian Rugby Union was formed. Games were to consist of two 45-minute halves, scoring values: Goal from the Field 5 points; Try 4 points; Goal from a Try 2 points; Penalty Kick and Free Kick 4 points each Safely Touch 2 points and a Rouge 1 point. ORFU rules were adopted by the CRU including an increase in the height of the goalposts to 20 feet from 13; scrimmage had to release the ball before the lines could come together and games were to be won by a majority of points scored. Edmonton defeated Calgary 6-5 in the Alberta Total-point Challenge Series.

1892- The first CRU championship game was played on Thanksgiving Day, November 10 at Toronto's Rosedale Field with Osgoode Hall of ORFU defeating the Montreal Football Club of the QRFU 45-5. ORFU assigned Umpires for all games. QRFU adopted a Balanced Schedule and lowered the value of a Goal from a Try to 2 points. The Manitoba Rugby Football Union was formed and played Fall and Spring Schedules.

1893- QRFU assigned Umpires for all games and returned to the Challenge Schedule format.

1894- Ottawa College and the Ottawa AAA joined the QRFU. QRFU adopted the Balanced Schedule.

1895- Timekeepers were appointed for the first time to relieve the referees of that duty. ORFU and QRFU lowered the value of Penalty Kicks to 2 points.

1896- CRU game length was reduced to two 40-minute halves and the size of a field was set a 110 yards by 65 yards. CRU published the first "Constitution, Rules of the Championship Competitions and Rules of the Game." MRFU adopted the CRU rules. QRFU introduced 5-yard Punt Returns.

1897- On November 24, the Canadian Intercollegiate Rugby Football Union was organized in Kingston, Ontario. CRU changed the length of a game to two 35-minute halves. The QRFU lowered the Free Kick

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 13, No. 1 (1991)

to 2 points and adopted a three-team playoff format. Ottawa AAA was suspended by the QRFU executive for excessive rough play.

1898- First Intercollegiate game was played between McGill and the University of Toronto on October 15. The U of T went on to win the Yates Trophy as intercollegiate champions. The CIRFU was accepted into the CRU, but leaves later in the year Ottawa AAA reorganized as the Rough Riders on September 9 and adopted the colors of the Canadian Regiment in the Spanish-American War: red and black. Ottawa joined the ORFU which adopted the Balanced Schedule of play. The CRU again changed the length of a game to two 30-minute halves.

1900- The ORFU prohibited the use of CIRFU players and the CRU stated that players must block with their bodies and not hold opponents with their arms or hands.

1901- The ORFU stated that all players must sign amateur cards. CRU rules that the ball was to be placed on the ground in line with the front foot of the Scrimmage before the lines could come together. John Thrift Meldrum Burnside's revised football rules were put into play in University of Toronto Inter-faculty games, and later in the Mulock Cup championship games.

1903- The ORFU adopted the Burnside Rules which reduced teams to 12 men per side put into play the Snap-Back system of moving the ball, required the offensive team to gain 10 yards on three downs, abolished the Throw-In from the sidelines, permitted only six men on the line, stated that all Goals by Kicking were to be worth 2 points and the opposition was to line up 10 yards from the defenders on all Kicks. The Rules were to be made uniform across the country as quickly as possible. The CIRFU, QRFU and CRU refused to adopt the new Rules. QRFU and CRU reduced their rosters from 15 to 14 players. CRU ruled that possession could not go beyond 3 scrimmages unless during the third scrimmage the ball was moved 5 yards on a run or a kick. Ottawa returned to the QRFU and MRFU moved to a fall schedule.

1904- The value of a Try (touchdown) was increased to 5 points and Goals from a Try was reduced to 1 point in the ORFU. QRFU adopted a rule by Tom (King) Clancy of Ottawa that a team must make 5 yards on its third scrimmage to keep possession of the ball.

1905- The Intercollegiate and Quebec Unions refused the Burnside Rules. For championship games, the CRU ruled the teams would use QRFU rules for the first half and the Intercollegiate rules for the second half. QRFU moved to four 15 minute quarters; Trys worth 5 points and Goals from Trys worth 1 point. CIRFU adopted 10 yard rule for 3 downs and the ORFU gave captains the option of playing four 15 minute quarters. Goals from the Field were increased to 3 points and the Fair Catch rule was replaced by a 3 yard Punt Return rule.

1906- Specifications first laid down for the size of football - 11 inches long, 23 inches in circumference and 13-3/4 ounces in weight. Goals from the Field and Free Kicks were increased to 4 points in the ORFU. Games were four 15 minute quarters in length. CIRFU lowered Goals from the Field to 4 points and Free Kicks to 3 points.

1907- The Interprovincial Rugby Football Union (Big Four) grew out of an amalgamation between the Hamilton Tigers, Toronto Argonauts of the ORFU and the Ottawa Rough Riders and the Montreal Football Club of the QRFU on September 13, 1907. The Ottawa entry was the result of the amalgamation of the Ottawa St. Pats and Rough Riders. Montreal won the Big Four's first game, 17-8 over Toronto and subsequently became the league's first championship team. The CRU adopted the Intercollegiate rule of 1 yard between opposing lines and stated that the lines could not move until the ball was put into play by the Scrimmage. Teams had to gain 10 yards in 3 downs; a Try was 5 points; a goal from a Try was 1 point; a Goal from the Field was 4 points, a Free Kick was 3 points and a Penalty Kick was worth 2 points. The ORFU adopted the CRU rules. The Edmonton Esquimaux Football Club and the Saskatchewan Rugby Football League were formed.

1908- Calgary Tigers and the Calgary Rugby Football Union came into existence. Goals from the Field were reduced to 3 points by the CRU.

1909- Lord Earl Grey, the Governor General of Canada, donated a trophy to be awarded for the Rugby Football Championship of Canada. Only teams registered with the Canadian Rugby Union were eligible to compete for the trophy. The first game was played in Toronto at Rosedale Field on December 4th

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 13, No. 1 (1991)

between the University of Toronto and the Parkdale Canoe Club with the University of Toronto winning 26-6 before 3,807 fans. The gross revenue was \$2,616.40. On December 11, following an invitation from the New York Herald newspaper, Hamilton Tigers and Ottawa Rough Riders played an exhibition game of Canadian football in New York City at Van Cortland Park. Tigers won 11-6 before 15,000 fans.

1910- Regina Rugby Club was formed on September 6th and on September 22nd the Saskatchewan Rugby Football Union was organized. SRFU adopted the CRU rules.

1911- Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta Unions formed the Western Canada Rugby Football Union on October 21st. Winnipeg realtor Hugo Ross donated the championship trophy bearing his name, he subsequently drowned in the sinking of the S.S. Titanic in April, 1912. Calgary Tigers won the Western Championship and challenged for the Grey Cup, but the CRU would not accept the challenge because the WCRFU was not a full member of the CRU.

1913- Hamilton Tigers played four exhibition matches in Western Canada defeating Winnipeg 26-1, Regina 26-4, Moose Jaw 25-1 and Calgary 19-2. This was the first documented East-West series of games.

1914- Hamilton Alerts (ORFU) amalgamate with Hamilton Tigers (IRFU). The CRU appointed Head Linesmen and the CIRFU adopted a 3 yard interference rule. IFRU adopted a Residence Rule.

1916-1918- No games because of First World War.

1919- No playoff games because of a rules dispute with the CRU in the West, lack of interest in the East and student studies to the Intercollegiate Union were more important.

1920- CIRFU and IRFU adopted a 4 yard Interference rule while the CRU opted for 3 yards of Interference.

1921- Western Canada Rugby Football Union joined the CRU and challenged for the Grey Cup. Edmonton Eskimos, first Western team to play in a Grey Cup game, lost to Toronto Argonauts 23-0. Rule changes included reducing players from 14 to 12 per side; putting ball into play by snapping it back; limit of 18 players with substitutes permitted freely.

1924- Coach Bill Hughes of Queen's introduced the use of films as a coaching technique. Numbering of players, although used for years, was made compulsory.

1925- McGill coach Frank Shaughnessy introduced the "huddle" system to Canadian Football. It was at first called the "Conference System."

1927- Western Intercollegiate union was formed.

1929- CRU adopts use of forward pass on a limited basis in Junior, Interscholastic, Western Canada Rugby Union, Western Intercollegiate union and the Grey Cup final. First legal pass in Canada was thrown by Gerry Seiberling and first reception by Ralph Losie of Calgary against Edmonton on September 21. Jersey Jack Campbell of Regina threw first forward pass in a Grey Cup game and Jerry Erskine made the first reception. First TD pass was by Edmonton's Joe Cook to Pal Power against a university of Alberta Team.

1930- On September 29, the first game played in Canada under floodlights saw Hamilton Tigers defeat University of British Columbia in an exhibition game at Athletic Park. The first game in Eastern Canada under floodlights was on October 29, between Oshawa and Toronto Balmy Beach in Toronto's Ulster Stadium. The convert kicking sport was moved up from the 35 line to the 25, but only drop kicks were allowed.

1931- CRU approved the forward pass for all leagues and the first TD pass in Grey Cup history was a Warren Stevens to Kenny Grant play in Montreal's 22-0 win over Regina. Convert scrimmage line was moved to the 5 yard line, and the point could be scored by a drop-kick, place-kick, run or pass.

1934- George (Red) Tellier of Montreal, who had been suspended for life for attacking George Golhooley of Regina in the 1931 Grey Cup final, was reinstated. Eastern Intercollegiate Union formally withdrew from Grey Cup competition. The horn was introduced to officiating this year.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 13, No. 1 (1991)

1935- For the first time a Western team won the Grey Cup. Winnipeg 'Pegs (they weren't Blue Bombers for another year) defeated Hamilton Tigers 18-12 in Hamilton.

1936- Teams were restricted to maximum of five imports and only players who had lived in Canada for a full year could compete in the Grey Cup Game. The Western Interprovincial Football Union (WIFU) was formed with Winnipeg Blue Bombers, Calgary Bronks and Regina Roughriders. Edmonton Eskimos joined in 1938 but dropped out again in 1940. A white ball was used for games played under floodlights in Western Canada. College teams stopped competing for the Grey Cup.

1937- The Quebec Rugby Football Union discontinued challenging for the Grey Cup.

1940- Only two-game total point series in Grey Cup history. Ottawa defeated Toronto Balmy Beach 8-2 and 12- 5. The series was arranged by the Canadian Rugby union when it refused to allow Winnipeg Blue Bombers, the western winners, to compete in the final because the west had played its season under rules which varied from rules in the east.

1941- Calgary dropped out of WIFU and Vancouver Grizzlies moved in.

1942- WIFU and IRFU suspend operation for duration of War.

1945- Calgary Bronks change name to Stampeders.

1946- Montreal Alouettes organized. Regina Roughriders change to Saskatchewan Roughriders. Air travel in football used for first time. Argos fly to Winnipeg for pre-season games.

1948- Hamilton Tigers of the IRFU (Big Four), join the ORFU, and the Hamilton Wildcats of the ORFU join the Big Four. Calgary Stampeders introduce pageantry to the Grey Cup Game with saddle horses and chuck wagons. Stampeders then beat Ottawa 120-7 for their first Grey Cup victory.

1949- Edmonton Eskimos rejoin WIFU. Wearing of helmets made compulsory.

1950- Hamilton Tigers and Hamilton Wildcats amalgamate to form Hamilton Tiger-Cats. First professional playoff game played at night under lights - Winnipeg at Edmonton. Grey Cup Game attendance - 27,101 at Varsity Stadium.

1951- E. Kent Phillips of Saskatoon is appointed Commissioner of WIFU.

1952- Television revenue for the first time. CRU was paid \$7,500 by CBC for Grey Cup TV rights. CBLT Toronto was only station to carry game live.

1953- Three television stations carried the Grey Cup game live, and the CRU was paid \$20,500 for the rights. Billy Vessels wins the first Schenley Award. G. Sydney Halter, Q.C. named Commissioner of WIFU.

1954- B.C. enters Western Conference League. Eastern Conference games televised over National network of NBC.

1955- Grey Cup played in the West for the first time at Vancouver's Empire Stadium, attendance 39,500, gross revenue \$198,000.

1956- Canadian Football Council was formed January 22 and national negotiation lists were introduced. Value of a touchdown was increased from 5 to 6 points. Television rights sold for \$101,000.