

THE QUEBEC RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

1883-1906 – Part 3

By Robert Sproule

1895: THE LOSS OF OTTAWA COLLEGE

The season opened with Ottawa City travelling to Montreal for the first match. Determined to put on a better show than last year, the Capitals obtained the services of one Jammie Smellie, late of the Osgoode Hallers. With a surprise defense, Ottawa held down Montreal's scoring. And with Smellie as quarterback, Ottawa was aggressive enough to score back to back tries to lead 10-6 at the break.

The first half was strictly an Ottawa affair, while the second was totally Montreal's. In the span of a few minutes the Black & Red overcame the visitors lead and went ahead on McDougall's try. From then, it was no turning back. With Arthur Fry equalling a record with 11 singles, Montreal ran up the score and doubled Ottawa 32-16.

Back in the capital, Ottawa College played host to the Britannia club. The Brits drew first blood but failed to gain any ground as several fumbles in key situations hampered their attack. The Garnet & Grey turned three of them into scores and, combined with their own running game, overpowered them for an easy 33-8 win.

The following weekend, on October 12, it was Montreal's turn to parry with Ottawa College. But as both teams played a defensive game, long runs, if any, were few. Ottawa backfielders employed a kicking strategy to advance upfield and hold the enemy at bay. Two singles and a safety touch gave them a 4-0 lead but this was short lived as Jack Savage kicked a beautiful goal-from-field to put Montreal ahead. Eddie Gleeson's third kickover tied the game and that was all the scoring. Neither team gained on the other and the second half was scoreless.

Now the controversy began. Under normal circumstances the teams would be credited with a tie and one point in the standings. However, Ottawa College decided to play the part of the spoiled brat. On the following Monday, Ottawa College told the Quebec Union Executive and the Montreal Football Club that they wanted another game due to the tie, even if it were to upset the current schedule. The Executive said that they would abide by their referee's decision, that the game would remain at a tie, to be replayed another time. Three days later, on October 17, Ottawa College stated that they didn't like the referee's call and wanted Montreal to replay the match next Saturday or else they were withdrawing from the QRFU for the remainder of the season.

On Friday October 18, the Union Executives exercised Rule No. 8 "*...in case of a tie in the series between two or more clubs, the tie shall be played off at a time and place determined by the Executive.*" Therefore, stated the Union, the matter would be resolved at the end of the season. Montreal said they would abide by the rules and Ottawa College said good-bye!

At the same time that the Montreal-Ottawa College tie game was played, Britannia and the McGill Redmen were engaged in battle. Although the score would tend to illustrate McGill's dominance, the game was actually a lot closer. Time and time again the Brits would make sizable gains only to fumble away scoring opportunities. McGill fared no better. Their runs for any sizable gains were few and they were called upon to kick the ball more often. Turnovers were the margin of victory for the Redmen as it gave them good field position. Molson's try in the first half was the turning point as they won the contest 13-2.

Ottawa City and Britannia engaged in another great kicking game. In the first half the Brits were all over the Capital City boys, first by scoring on a Whitham try, and then 7 consecutive singles by Sanderson gave them the half 13-0. And then Ottawa woke up and started to play football. A try and a Penalty Kick put them behind 13-6 but kick after kick by Smith into the endzone forced Britannia to slowly give up points until Ottawa had a great come-from-behind win 15-13.

Montreal had no trouble against a weakened Britannia club. They toyed with them in the first half 14-1 and then scored time and time again in the second half. When the game was finally called, much to the satisfaction of the Brits, Arthur Fry had scored 17 points enroute to a 39-1 score.

Ottawa City seemed to be getting their game in order. Against McGill on October 26 they battled the students up and down the field in the first half for a slim 7-6 lead. In the second half they held them to a few points while they scored twice on the ground and won 18-12.

The last game was between McGill and Montreal and was a nothing game for the Black & Red as they were getting ready for the playoffs the following week. Montreal was limited to two safety touches and a single while McGill scored all their points in the first half and won 8-5.

Because of the games forfeited by Ottawa College, the first playoff game was between McGill and Montreal. The game was played on a very muddy field due to hard rain. McGill failed to adjust to the conditions and were held

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 23, No. 4 (2001)

to two rouges in each half. Montreal, on the other hand, adjusted better and controlled the winglines. A try by Massey in the first half made it 4-1 but their kicking game in the second half grassed several students as they won 13-2.

The second playoff game with Ottawa City proved to be more of a challenge. Montreal controlled Ottawa in the first half 11-2 but found them with more fight after the intermission. Both teams matched the other for points but Montreal managed to hold off the Ottawa rally and won Provincial honors 19-11.

1895 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agt</u>	<u>Pts</u>
MONTREAL Football Club	3	1	0	81	30	6
McGILL UNIVERSITY	3	1	0	33	25	6
OTTAWA CITY Football Club	3	1	0	49	57	6
OTTAWA COLLEGE	1	3	0	38	13	2
BRITANNIA Football Club	0	4	0	24	100	0

PLAYOFFS

Montreal 13 McGill 2

Montreal 19 Ottawa City 11

1895 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Arthur Fry, Montreal	2	3	0	0	15	29
Wilbert Molson, McGill	3	1	0	0	6	20
Jack Savage, Montreal	1	0	0	2	1	15
Percy Sanderson, Britannia	0	1	0	0	11	13
Gordon Macdougall, Montreal	2	0	0	0	0	8

The CRU Final was played at the Montreal AAA Grounds on November 21 against the University of Toronto, winners of the Ontario Union. In front of 3,000 fans on a snow cleared dry field with the temperature near zero, the teams battled for the championship. Against the wind Varsity kept the ball in scrimmage and their wingmen were strong enough to block the Montreal rushes. In spite of their gains and superior line, they failed to score. Although play was mostly in their end, Montreal could only scrimmage the ball about a half dozen times. Toward the end of the first half a free kick gave them a rouge, and then shortly they broke for intermission, ahead 1-0.

The rest allowed Varsity to make tactical changes that opened up their running game. A tough-in-goal tied the score but several runs over the line, two by Joe McDougall and one by Courtney Kingstone, gave Varsity command of the game. Montreal managed to recover a Toronto fumble in the end zone for a disputed score but three rouges by Kingstone gave the championship to Varsity 20-5.

1896: THE RETURN OF OTTAWA COLLEGE

During the off-season Ottawa College reconsidered their position in the football world and realized the error of their ways. They re-applied to the Quebec RFU and were warmly welcomed back into the game, a decision some teams would later regret.

The first Saturday of October pitted Ottawa City against Montreal. Now either Montreal had lost a bit of their game or the Capital boys had picked up theirs a bit. The match was hard fought with all the scoring in the first half. The difference was that Ottawa was able to convert their try and Montreal could not add onto their points in the second half. When time was called Ottawa had the contest 6-5.

The second match of the season was between the two Ottawa teams. The College boys, reorganized and stronger than ever, had one Eddie Gleeson, runner and punter supreme. An inability to stop Gleeson was the difference, as his play selection won the game for the students 13-6.

At the same time, McGill and Britannia were having a scoring spree. First Whitham broke off an 85 yard scoring run. Several plays later his teammate, Irving, duplicated the feat with another 85 yard run and the Brits were up 10-1. Then McGill found their running game. Five consecutive trys from scrimmage upped the game 22-12 at the half and after the break the Redmen continued their scoring. Trys, safety touches and goals-from-field doubled their points enroute to a 46-12 victory. McGill had set a record with 8 trys, all rushing.

Montreal dominated Ottawa College in the first half 5-1, but a punt return by Murphy jump-started the students in the second half. Twelve unanswered points under the direction of Eddie Gleeson gave them the game 18-6.

Against McGill, the Redmen failed to contain Gleeson. Several punts were not returned as time and time again McGill was rouged. Once, from 25 yards out, Gleeson faked the kick and ran the ball in for the only try of the game. A safety touch in the second half added to their score and Ottawa College won their third in a row 13-2.

Britannia found Montreal unstoppable on October 24. They could do no right and Montreal could do no wrong. The Black & Red controlled the wingline, the kicking game and the running game. And when the final whistle was blown, they had scored four trys and a 21-0 victory.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 23, No. 4 (2001)

The following week, McGill gave Montreal a better battle. The teams fought to a 1-1 score at the break, but then Montreal started to dominate. Their defense shut down McGill, gave them good field position, and the wingline popped Armstrong and Massey for trys. Montreal won 15-1.

And then history was made. Britannia was going nowhere this season and was the weakest of all the teams, especially against the run. Ottawa City on the other hand was 1 & 1 and had a few special plays to try out. The first half was typical of both teams, each testing the others wingline waiting for a break to score. First Ottawa pushed Johnny Powers over, then the Brits tied the game on McRobie's fine run.

But in the second half it was all Ottawa; or rather it was all Johnny Powers. First he banged over for his second try of the game. Several plays later he ran over the line for his third try. Later, with the Brits watching him, he faked a run and kicked a touch-in-goal to put Ottawa up 13-4. When Ottawa marched toward the goal line a pass-out was made to Powers and he scored his fourth try of the game and finally, toward the end of the match, he ran for his fifth try of the contest, a new Canadian Senior record. The Brits managed a late converted try but they were happy to see the last of Powers and Ottawa City 24-10.

Next was McGill. They were stronger than Britannia and had an excellent wingline. They were able to control the Ottawa running and were able to safety run out all punts. Although Powers was a marked man and his runs were limited, he managed to return a McGill punt for a major but that was all of Ottawa's scoring. McGill scored at will with kicks and funs. Four trys in the first half made it 19-4 and another 12 after the break won it 31-4.

The last game of the season was the best against the worst. Britannia had a very porous line that allowed Ottawa College free running. The students had their running game in high gear and ran and ran all over the Brits. Of the eight trys scored, Gleeson had three and Smith had two. Murphy, Shea and Ross had the others as Ottawa shut out the once proud Britannia Football Club 37-0.

1896 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agt</u>	<u>Pts</u>
OTTAWA COLLEGE	4	0	0	81	14	8
OTTAWA CITY Football Club	2	2	0	40	59	4
MONTREAL Football Club	2	2	0	47	25	4
McGILL UNIVERSITY	2	2	0	80	44	4
BRITANNIA Football Club	0	4	0	22	128	0

1896 SCORING LEADERS

	<u>trys</u>	<u>goals</u>	<u>p-fk</u>	<u>goals</u>	<u>sin</u>	<u>pts</u>
Eddie Gleeson, Ottawa College	5	0	0	0	9	29
Johnnie Powers, Ottawa City	6	0	0	0	1	25
Michael Shea, Ottawa College	2	0	0	0	4	16
Levesque, McGill	3	1	1	0	0	16
Mathenson, McGill	1	1	0	1	1	12

The Dominion Final at the nation's capital was an all-university affair. Both Varsity and Ottawa College were undefeated in all of their four games this year and both were the two best teams in Canada.

However, the weather was a factor. The heavy fall of snow, then rain degenerated the game into an exhibition of tight scrimmages and mass plays. First Varsity scored on Chaucer Elliott's 20 yard run but then Ottawa managed to get on the board with a safety touch. Combination plays and some fine running gave them two trys and a rouge to lead 11-4 at the break. A kick by Smith gave them another point and their wingline held a Varsity rally to a short run by Kingstone as the Ottawa College team won their third Dominion Final.

At the AGM on December 5, it was decided to give the punt return man some protection by introducing a 5-yard rule before tackling.

1897: THE DISGRACE OF OTTAWA CITY

The season started off with the absence of the Britannia Football Club. Formed back in 1880, they were the only other "city" team in Montreal and of course cross-town rivals. Whereas the Montreal team had the better caliber of players of the years (and provincial titles), Britannia failed to produce any great players or teams since the formation of the Quebec Union. They had won only one game since '94, lost more than their share of games, and several players had had enough.

The first game of the new season was between the two city clubs, Ottawa City and the Montreal football club. It was going to be a very hard fought game as from the start Montreal scored first on two converted trys to go up 12-0. Ottawa came back with some fine play selection to narrow the score 12-10 at the break. The second was just as hard fought and the teams exchanged scores before Montreal pulled away in the later stages of the half to win 26-14.

The return match started off wrong right from the beginning. First the game was late starting. Kickoff was at 3:00 PM instead of the traditional 2 or 2:30 PM start. Again Montreal got off to a quick 10-0 lead and that got Ottawa upset. But they came back and in spite of their rough play managed to lead at the half 12-10. A change in tactic for Ottawa seemed to work as they started to take control of the game and pile on the points. But the game was taking too long. It had been going on for some three and a half hours when, with about 4 and a half minutes left, the

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 23, No. 4 (2001)

officials called the game on account of darkness. This was the first time in Union history that a match was called. It was a hard fought contest but Ottawa had won the return game 31-20.

Dominion Champions Ottawa College was ready for McGill but somewhere they left their playbook behind. They scored first but McGill started to dominate the wingline and out play them. When time was called McGill had beaten up on the Ottawa students 22-8.

The game between the two Montreal teams bogged down to a kicking game. First Montreal scored and then McGill came back to make it 13-5 at the half. In spite of the rain in the second half, McGill tied the score on McLea's goal-from-the-field. This was short lived as Hamilton kicked the winning point for Montreal 14-13.

The first meeting between the two Ottawa teams was just as tight. The city team made it 5-1 at the half, held off a student rally late in the uneventful game and won 5-4.

And now the problems started. Both Ottawa City and Montreal complained about their game that was called due to darkness. On October 19, the Executive decided that should both teams finish in a tie at the end of the season there would be a playoff game, otherwise the score stood.

Ottawa College seemed to find their championship form against Montreal. They opened with a big 17-0 lead before the Black & Red scored, made it a commanding 23-6 at the half, and, with the help of certain key fumbles by the Montreal halves, won easily 35-6.

Ottawa City seemed to have some problems with McGill. Duffy scored on an Ottawa fumble and Molson converted to make it 16-1. Or did he? The goal judge Mr. Fry said the kick was good while the referee Mr. Bayley said it wasn't. Rather than hold up the game, the teams decided to continue to play. Ottawa came back on Johnnie Powers' try, and Stuart Cameron's kick won the game 20-19. However, rather than take the game to the Executive because of Molson's apparent convert, Ottawa was content to drop a point and make it a draw.

McGill found Ottawa College and Eddie Gleeson just too strong. In spite of the apparent close score Gleeson's fine kicking on a Penalty Kick, singles and a goal-from-the-field gave Ottawa a 15-0 halftime score. McGill kept kicking over the student line for ten points but a short run by Coping made it 19-10 for Ottawa College.

In Montreal, the McGill-Montreal match was another die-hard game with no quarter given. The teams fought hard and each tried to control the others wingline and create mistakes to capitalize on. Montreal scored first on a McGill fumble. Then McGill returned a Montreal fumble, and a rouge by Davidson made it 5-4 for the Redmen at the half. They added on to their score to make it 8-4 but Montreal came back kick by kick. With several minutes left and nursing a slim lead 8-7, McGill made a bad play and fumbled the leather. Murphy returned the loose ball over the line and gave Montreal the victory 11-8.

And then history was made once again. On November 6, both Ottawa teams played their second game against each other. Referee Cathern of Montreal called the captains before the start of the match and informed them that this was a game and not a war. Regardless of the warning, it was going to be a very rough and hard fought game. Ottawa College scored first on two rouges. Then they scored on two runs to make it 8-2. The city team was grassed twice for safety touches and a Gleeson kick put them just one point behind at intermission.

At the break Referee Cathern once again told both captains that if they didn't start to play football instead of tearing each other apart, he would walk off the field and report the matter to the Union. There were too many bloody noses and mouths, split ears, blackened eyes, torn lips and eye brows. Gleeson had a broken nose, and McGuiken had his head cut open for three stitches.

The teams seemed to settle down and play football. Ottawa College came back and in short time kicked another single to tie it 8-8. For the balance of the game the teams moved up and down the field, but neither side was able to add on to their score.

Halfback Smith of the college team and Walters, one of the wingmen of the city team, had been mixing it up all game. But now push led to shove and they started fighting. In the scuffle Smith fell to the ground and Walters kicked him. The referee interfered and ruled Walters off the field for the balance of the game. Walters protested the call, punched Mr. Cathern and then tried to kick him before finally leaving the field. While the referee was being attended to and everyone was standing around trying to understand the shocking events, Walters returned to the field asking to be reinstated by umpire Mr. Cairns. Cairns refused and ordered him off the field. Walters then punched him in the face, kicked him in the groin and then ran off the field and into immortality.

Once peace and order had been restored to some degree the game continued, but with seven minutes to play Referee Cathern call the game on account of darkness for an 8-8 tie.

The Walters incident was reported to the Executive. At the emergency meeting on November 10 Ottawa City, in defense, stated they had suspended Mr. Walters and apologized to the referee. But Ottawa College wanted blood. Chairman Mr. Claxton stated that he saw one Ottawa City game and considered it "*...the most brutal game he witnessed in the past 28 years.*" The roughness was not on the part of a few but on the whole club. His motion was seconded. Ottawa City was suspended from the Quebec Rugby Football Union for extremely rough play, unsportsmanlike conduct and failure to maintain control. All games to that point were declared void. Mr. Walters was expelled for striking an official and prohibited from playing with any club in the Quebec Union. And his whereabouts are still unknown.

Now this caused some scheduling problems with the remaining teams. At the moment Montreal was in first place, Ottawa City in second but tied Montreal with 6 points. Ottawa College was next with 5 points and McGill a

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 23, No. 4 (2001)

distant fourth. But the Executive resolved to cancel all the games played to that point and ordered two more matches to complete the season.

First, on November 13, Ottawa College and Montreal played their game. Remembering their earlier 35-6 loss, Montreal played inspiring football and controlled the students. Bob Macdougall scored 8 points as Montreal limited the students to a single Gleeson kick, and broke for the half leading comfortably 13-1. But if the first 70 minutes was Montreal's then the second part of the game belonged to Ottawa College. An onside kick by Levesque got them going. Then two more rouges by Gleeson and a converted try by Levesque tied the game. With minutes left Gleeson punted into the endzone and the Montreal player was grassed for the winning score 14-13.

Against McGill on November 20, Ottawa College found them to be of little competition. Two tries and several kicks over the line in the first half was the margin of victory. The Ottawa students proved to be too strong for their Quebec counterparts. Eleven nothing at intermission and no scoring in the second half gave Ottawa College another Provincial title.

1897 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agst</u>	<u>Pts</u>
OTTAWA COLLEGE	2	0	0	25	13	4
MONTREAL Football Club	0	1	0	13	14	0
McGILL UNIVERSITY	0	1	0	0	11	0

1897 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Levesque, Ottawa College	2	1	0	0	0	10
Hartland Macdougall, Montreal	1	1	1	0	0	8
Smith, Ottawa College	2	0	0	0	0	8
Joe Gleeson, Ottawa College	0	0	0	0	7	7
Eddie Murphy, Montreal	1	0	0	0	0	4

The Dominion Final was played in front of 3,000 fans at Montreal on November 25 between Ottawa College and the new ORFU champions, Hamilton Tigers. The field was covered in snow with fine light snow falling from a moderate wind at times. Masses of snow or ice were at the sides but the advantage would have to be given to Ottawa. They wore canvas shoes compared to the heavy Tigers boots and their skill, speed and combination plays would overcome Hamilton strength and weight.

The students took an early command on two fluky tries. First Smith found an opening in the line and took off. Just as he was about to be tackled he passed to Lafleur who outran the Tiger halves for the score. Then an offside body check penalty against Hamilton gave College the ball near the line. On the second rush Smith was over and College led 10-0. Hamilton came back with several plays up the field and managed to narrow the score to 5 points on a fumble return and a single. After the break College changed their tactics. When the Tigers expected a run, College punted. When they expected a kick, College ran. And just when it seemed the Tigers were pressing, Eddie Murphy broke off a 50 yard scoring run for the students. Whenever Hamilton tried to make a game of it the students shut them down. A late rally notched Hamilton another 4 points on two singles by Jack Counsell and a safety touch, but Ottawa College held on for Dominion honors 14-10.

At the AGM on December 4 McGill resigned from the Quebec Union and joined the Inter-Collegiate Rugby Football Union that was formed ten days earlier. This new union was just for the college kids and played under a new set of rules. Actually McGill would fair no better, winning both games over Queens University but losing a key game to the eventual Union winners, Varsity.