

THE QUEBEC RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

1883-1906 – Part 5

By Robert Sproule

1901: THE BRITANNIA FOOTBALL CLUB

In the opening game of the new season, Ottawa College continued their dominance over Britannia. The students controlled the wingline and scored all their points in the first half. The Brits tried to make a game of it but fell short 10-7. However, they protested the match as one of the College wingmen was a non-resident. On October 16, the QRFU Executive awarded the game to Britannia.

The first half was a scoreless game between Brockville and Montreal. The Black & Red scored first but the Island City-15 came back for a thrilling 7-4 victory.

Normally Montreal could count on an easy win against Britannia, but today the Brits got revenge on all the games they lost to their cross-town rivals. William Christmas was the main reason. His fine kicking, including a goal-from-field, combined with two tries by Donnelly on fumble returns, gave the Brits a shocking 27-8 win.

Brockville couldn't get untracked in their game with Ottawa College. Right from the start the College Kids over-powered their opponents. Three tries gave them a comfortable 17-0 halftime lead. In the second half they shut down any Brockville attempts to rally and shocked Ritchie's team 31-0.

The students carried their game into next week against Montreal and dominated their scrumage and wingline. Ahead 11-0 at the half they converted another try before Montreal got their first points. When time was called, the Student Body had the game 17-2.

The first half belonged to the Brits as they controlled the ball in all departments and scored at the right moment against the Brockville-15. However, the second half belonged to Brockville as they started to show flashes of the past. Two converted tries by John MacLaren gave them the match as they doubled the weak Brits 14-7.

The return game with Ottawa College was indeed a tough and brutal affair at Brockville. The teams traded high and long punts and several long runs. The lines fought each other on every scrumage and the tackling was vicious at times. A student fumble that was returned over the line gave Brockville first blood. They added several more points on kicks before Hal Walters was finally pushed over the line for Ottawa. Several minutes before the game was called, Brockville scored again to take the match 16-4.

And Britannia continued to control the Montreal game. The Brits scored two tries before the half on tries by Anderson and William Christmas, then executed a brilliant outside kick by Johnson to surprise Montreal again 14-1.

If Montreal had enough of William Christmas and his educated toe, then Brockville was to find out how good a kicker he was. His team gained good field position, allowing Mr. Christmas to boot the ball far and deep. Brockville runners had no chance in getting the ball out. Eight kicks over the game for single points gave the Brits another victory 11-5.

The Montreal-15 were indeed in a decline. Although they held the Students to 7 points at the break, they failed to contain their passing plays. Three runs over the line by Walters and Ottawa College shut out the Black & Red 28-0.

And then came the battle for first place. If the Brits won they would be one game up on Ottawa College. If the Student Body won, then they would tie Britannia, thus forcing a playoff match. And that is exactly what happened. The Brits scored first on a Donnelly fumble return only to have College tie it on a run by Ovide LaFleur (no relation to Guy). The Brits came back with three more points on a safety and a rouge to lead 7-4 at the half.

But in the second half, Britannia failed to contain the likes of Gleeson and Gallagher for Ottawa. These two, with their splendid display of kicks and great runs, were instrumental in giving their team excellent field position. Gallagher counted for ten points on kicks. Gleeson was responsible for 7 points on a try and singles and he helped set up Dooner for three runs over the line. The final whistle came none too soon for Britannia as they were trounced 34-7.

Now it was up to the Brockville-15. If they won their next match over Montreal, they could regain some authority on the field and force a three-way tie for first place. The game was hard fought with neither team giving ground. Both sides kept the ball in scrumage as long as possible before making a pass-out for a run or a kick, and the winglines prevented any long runs to the outside.

Montreal scored first on a long rouge. Brockville came back when MacLaren was pushed over the line for a 4-1 lead at intermission. Jimmy Craig's scoring run gave the Black & Red the lead for good and they held on for a stubborn 8-6 win. It was Montreal's only win of the season. But the mighty Brockville team, last year's powerhouse, finished with a dismal 3 and 3 record.

The playoff game for provincial honors demonstrated the strength of both clubs. College had the better attack and defense, where as Britannia gave up almost as many points as it scored. In spite of the snow on the ground, the College Kids ran and kicked as they pleased. They controlled the scrumage and the wingline. They controlled the pass and they controlled the tempo of the game. They scored five tries, two on fumble returns, and kicked another 10 points for a commanding 30-0 score at the break. Although the Brits failed to advance the ball, they played inspired defense in the second half. They shut down the College attack and surprised the students by returning three of their many fumbles for scores. But it was too little too late and the final was 30-14 for Ottawa for their fourth Provincial title.

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1901 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agt</u>	<u>Pts</u>
OTTAWA College	4	2	0	124	32	8
BRITANNIA Football Club	4	2	0	73	73	8
BROCKVILLE Football Club	3	3	0	48	65	6
MONTREAL Football Club	1	5	0	23	99	2

Playoff

Ottawa College 30, Britannia Football Club 14

1901 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
George Gallagher, Ottawa College	0	10	0	0	18	38
Jack Dooner, Ottawa College	7	0	0	0	0	28
William Christmas, Britannia	1	0	1	1	16	27
John MacLaren, Brockville	2	5	0	0	0	18
LaFleur, Ottawa College	4	0	0	0	0	16

The Dominion Championship was played on Saturday November 23 at the Montreal AAA Grounds. On the sunny but cold day and on a hard field, the Argonauts were ready for a tough game and relied on their wingmen to control the game. But the fast breaking style of the students caught Toronto off guard early in the game. Touchdowns by Fillatrault and Hal Walters plus rouges by Gleeson put the Quebec champs up 11-0 at intermission.

Toronto came back right from the opening kickoff with the wind at their backs. Employing a punting game, they marched up the field in grand fashion and kicked over the line three times and secured two trys to tie the game. Then C.W. "Pussy" Darling kicked over the line and for the first time the Argos led. College came back and put Eddie Gleeson in position to boot the tying point. Both clubs failed to break the stalemate in the dying minutes of the game and Referee John Savage called the game on account of darkness.

The CRU ordered a replay and a week later Toronto made a second trip to Montreal. The students played a stubborn game, holding the Argos to a few exciting runs. Twice, Percy Hardesty, who would later gain fame in western Canadian football, kicked over the line and Toronto seemed in control 2-0. But just before the first whistle, the Collegiate-15 maneuvered into position and Eddie Gleeson kicked a splendid 13 yard goal-from-field by the drop kick. Ottawa was ahead 5-2.

Before the second half was a few minutes old, College doubled their score as Gleeson kicked his second goal-from-field from 20 yards out. The Argos were determined to get a try on mass plays but the Students stopped them on every occasion, forcing Hardesty to kick his third rouge from 40 yards. In the latter stages of the game, both Fillatrault and Walters secured trys on 10 and 20 yard runs and Ottawa College, thanks to the return of Gleeson, had another National championship 18-3.

1902: OTTAWA COLLEGE AGAIN

In the opening game, Ottawa College continued where they left off from last season. They ran all over a weak Britannia defense and scored all but four of their first half points on kicks. The Brits, failing to provide any sort of greatness from the previous season, managed a rouge. They gave up another touchdown as Ottawa won an easy game 13-1.

Both Montreal and Brockville contained the others passing plays for little gains as they played to a scoreless first half. Then Hedley Suckling kicked a touch-in-goal, a goal-from-field and secured a try over the line as the Black & Red shut out the visitors 11-0.

College travelled to Brockville and found the home team surprisingly strong in the first half. They gave up a safety and two rouges to fall behind 4-2. Ottawa replied with their own safety touch to tie the game and then adopted a controlled scrimmage game. Fillatrault scored a try, and two singles by Gallagher gave the Student Body their second victory 12-4.

The fans expected another thrilling game between Montreal and Britannia with, of course, the Black & Red thrashing the Brits, or at least winning by a decent score. The game, by modern standards, would have been considered a bit of a bore. Neither side generated any real form of offense or any big runs, and the game developed into a stalemate in spite of Montreal taking a 1-0 halftime lead. The teams continued to struggle on the field for most of the second half until a safety touch gave the Brits the game. They added a rouge to take the contest 3-1.

On a rare Thursday afternoon game at the Capital, Montreal continued to struggle. But this time it was against a well disciplined Ottawa College team. Two converted touchdowns put College up 12 points before Montreal cut the score in half. Callaghan's beautiful goal-from-field after intermission started the College machine. Three trys, three rouges and a safety touch overpowered the visitors 38-6.

Mud and Rain. Nobody wanted to play the game, but it had to be played regardless of the weather. In the first half Brockville was able to make better headway in the mud than the Brits, and several massed plays resulted in MacLaren going over the line. Before the break, a rouge made it 5-0 for Brockville. Realizing that they were able to keep the game close, the Brits opened the last half with great determination. They found their running game, with both Anderson and McKenzie scoring trys. A safety touch doubled the score 10-5 for Britannia. It was to be the last victory for the Britannia club. They would go winless next season, once again finishing dead last. Unable to find suitable replacement players, they finally called it quits before the start of 1904.

As successful as they were against Brockville, Ottawa College continued to give the Brits problems. Under better playing conditions than last week's game, Britannia failed to hold the famous student running attack. They ran around the Brit wingline, passing the ball just before the tackle for great gains. They ran through it for more real estate and they kicked up the field for excellent field position. Three runs by Dooner, including one from an onside kick, virtually gave Ottawa the game 22-0 at the break. College checked the Brits attack at every point and finished the game with another converted try for an easy 28-0 win.

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The late October game at Brockville proved to be a surprise to the fans. Many thought Brockville was very weak, considering the 11-0 beating the Montreal-15 gave them in the second game of the season, and this one started off the same. It was a hard fought struggle for both winglines and halfbacks, with neither gaining much ground. However, Montreal managed two kicks to the deadline and broke at the half with a comfortable 2-0 score.

If anyone was to be the hero in front of the home fans it was Johnny MacLaren. His runs and kicks for a 14 point afternoon turned the tables on the visitors and sparked an upset in the making. Montreal failed to hold the Brockville runners as they dominated the second half. At the final whistle the Island City boys took the match 29-8.

Apparently Montreal couldn't get untracked against College. Although they were ahead 1-0 at the half and held the student runners in check, they were outkicked by the likes of one Mr. Gallagher. His educated toe tied the game in the last half. He set up Lafleur for a try and then converted for an 8-1 victory.

Travelling to Brockville was not a good thing. Britannia felt that if they beat Brockville in the mud and rain then a dryer field would be to their advantage. But again MacLaren was back to his old form. His fine runs and well placed kicks put the home team up 16-0 at halftime. Britannia tried to make a game of it in the second half, even outscoring the Brock Boys 7-4, but the rally fell short and they lost 20-7.

And now the fun began. If Montreal defeated Britannia in their return game they would tie them with similar 2-4 records. But if they lost the Brits would finish in second place with a 3-3 record. This was not the case. The Montreal-15 took control in the first half and outplayed their cross-town rivals, but only outscored them 4-1. Each side scored converted majors in the next frame of play but Montreal held on for a tight 10-7 win.

Nobody was going to catch Ottawa College. But if the Brock Boys took College to task, they would split their season and capture second place. Well, yes and no. Of course College won, but because Brockville had outscored the other Montreal teams, they still finished second. College was too strong and had one of the best defenses in the country.

It was a tough and hard fought first half. Brockville made several exciting plays and great gains but failed to score. College, on the other hand, got better runs and twice placed the ball over the line to lead 8 nothing at the break. In the second half the students were all over the Brock wingline. Filiatreault finished the game with three trys: a run, a fumble return, and an inside kick. Gallagher kicked another seven points, including two "converts" and College captured first place with a perfect six and 0 season.

1902 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agt</u>	<u>Pts</u>
OTTAWA COLLEGE	6	0	0	126	12	12
BROCKVILLE Football Club	2	4	0	58	76	4
MONTREAL Football Club	2	4	0	38	85	4
BRITANNIA Football Club	2	4	0	28	77	4

1902 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
George Gallagher, Ottawa College	0	7	0	1	13	32
John MacLaren, Brockville	4	5	0	0	1	27
Filiatreault, Ottawa College	6	0	0	0	0	24
Jack Dooner, Ottawa College	7	0	0	0	0	28
Hedley Suckling, Montreal	1	2	0	1	3	16

The CRU Championship was played between the two undefeated Ottawa teams. All the scoring was in the first half and all by the Rough Riders. They worked with the wind in the first half and then controlled the ball in scrimmage in the second half. First, they got close enough for Boyd to kick a touch-in-goal for the first point. Then, several plays later, when the ball was moved toward the College line, Hal Walters ran over the line for the only try of the game. Paar missed the kick for the convert and the Riders had a 5-0 lead.

For the remainder of the game both clubs battled the other to a stalemate, with gains and losses equal on both sides. College kicks over the line were quickly returned and the famous student running game was held in check. The Riders were content to sit on their lead for the balance of the match. With five minutes left, College brought veteran Eddie Gleeson into the game in hopes of winning the match. But the Riders kept the ball in scrimmage and away from Gleeson and at the final whistle they were Canada's best. The Rough Riders had defeated Ottawa College for a second time for the CRU title and it was their third Dominion championship in five years.

Now the winds of change were blowing hard in both the Ontario and the Quebec Union. The Burnside Rules was a hot topic in the football world and called for radical changes. Basically it called for teams to be reduced from 15 to 12 per side, the ball snapped rather than heeled to the quarterback, and the attacking team had to advance the ball 10 yards in three downs.

At their December 6 Annual Meeting the Quebec Union voted against the Burnside Rules. Instead, they dropped the Flying Wing position, reducing teams to 14 players. A week later, the Inter-Collegiate Union also voted down the Burnside Rules but reduced teams to 14 aside. At the same time, the ORFU installed these radical rules for the next season.

But there was some merit in these Rules. Although the CRU wasn't going to change the very nature of Canadian football overnight, they stated in their December 20 Meeting that the game must be more open. "...no team shall be allowed possession of the ball for more than 3 scrimmages (downs) unless during the last scrimmage the ball has been advanced 5 yards by a run or has been kicked towards the oppositions goal."

In fact in two Varsity and Argonaut games for the City Championship on November 15 and 22nd, both games drew crowds of well over 1,500 fans.

1903: THE RETURN OF OTTAWA CITY

The ORFU was thinking of expansion. Ottawa would play in an eastern division with Kingston and Peterboro while the Hamilton Tigers, London, the Argonauts, the Toronto Torontos and the Hamilton West End Pleasure Club would form the western division.

However, on September 22, the Ottawa Rough Riders dropped out of the ORFU, citing they wouldn't play the Burnside Rules or play against weaker (intermediate) teams such as Kingston and Peterboro. Instead they scheduled a series of exhibition games for the season but, on September 29, they heard that Brockville dropped out of the Quebec Union because there were no replacement players. The Riders applied and were accepted back into the Quebec RFU with open arms the next day.

In the opening game, Montreal played a tight game with Ottawa College. Jimmy Craig broke the game open with a 25 yard touchdown run in the first half to put Montreal ahead. They held the Gleeson brothers in check, staved off a late College rally, and handed Ottawa their first defeat in two years 6 to 5.

The Rough Riders, as usual, had no problem with the Britannia Club. They were up 17-0 at the break on runs by Kennedy, McGee and Hal Walters. They added another converted score in the second half and won convincingly 23-0.

Montreal and Britannia played next. Although both teams played to a 6-6 tie in the first half, Montreal found their game after the break. The Brits failed to control the likes of Craig and Percy Molson. Montreal ran off 26 more points and took the easy contest 32-7.

The Ottawa Game was almost a repeat of last year's CRU championship. A tight and hard fought match at the capital provided a lot of scrapping and rough play. And once again Hal Walters was the hero of the day, as he scored the only try, as the Riders defeated College 7-1.

The battle for first place was at Montreal on Friday October 16. Montreal scored first on a rouge and a safety touch. Walters scored his traditional comeback try and the Rough Riders had a slim lead 4-3 at the half. And that was it for Ottawa as Molson and Craig put on another splendid exhibition of running and kicking. Montreal took first place 10-4.

Eddie and Joe Gleeson were the story against the Britannia club. Their passing and kicking combination plays were too much for the Brits. Although a tight and scrappy match, Ottawa College adjusted to the mud and the rain better and had their second win of the season 10-4.

It was obvious that the Britannia Football Club was going nowhere this season. Their wingline was weak and their backs failed to convert key gains into scores. In their match with the Riders, Ottawa simply out ran and out kicked them for position. Four tries and a single gave the Black & Red the game 17-2.

Surprisingly, Montreal failed to add on to their standings when they played Ottawa College. Whenever Montreal seemed to move up the field and poised to score the go-ahead point, the student held and kicked out of danger. College drew first blood on two singles, gave up a scoring run by Russell, and came back with an inside kick by LaFleur to lead 6-4 at intermission. Kern's try in the second half gave the students another 4 points, but when Percy Molson failed to convert his own try on a wide kick, Ottawa College took the game by a 10-9 score. But most important, Montreal and the Riders were tied in the standings.

Again, Montreal failed to control their games. At home with Ottawa, it was another battle for first place. Both teams engaged in a kicking game in the first half and a 2-2 tie at the break. Percy Molson's scoring run put Montreal up and perhaps first place was insight. But then the Murphy boys, Ed and Pat, started to shine with several running and kicking plays. Several points later Ottawa had the game 11-6 and first place, while Montreal dropped to second.

The College-Britannia game was a forgone conclusion. The students dominated in all mechanics of the game. Their wingline controlled the Brits and their backs ran wild. Up 19-0 with several minutes left in the match, Gleeson placed a long kick deep in the endzone. College players drew down on Alex Christmas for an apparent rouge. Suddenly Alex broke through and was off. Running through a few defenders, he avoided all tacklers, and some 120 yards later placed the oval over the line. It was the longest run recorded in Canadian football history. College won their third of the season 19-4.

In the opening stages of the Ottawa College-Rough Rider game, the students were all over the city team. They called the right plays at the right time and advanced on the Rider line at will. A fumble return by Fillatrault started the scoring for the students and soon they were ahead 12-6 at the intermission. But then the Riders took over and played a more aggressive game in the second half. They took control of the line and the ball in scrimmage. Another Hal Walters try started the comeback, and three rouges by Eddie Murphy gave the tight game to Ottawa 13-12 and first place, with five wins and one loss.

The last game of the season was between Montreal and the Brits. Montreal scored first on a touch in goal, but Britannia came back on a splendid run by Eddie Chown, later of Winnipeg football fame, to lead 6-1, and an upset was in the works. But like so many time in the past, the Brits were never a match nor an equal to their cross-town rivals. In the second half Percy Molson put on a one-man kicking show. Time and time again he placed the ball over the line, compelling the defended to rouge or be tackled just over the line. His kicks set up veteran Hedley Suckling's touchdown run as Montreal won 15-6 and finished in second place 4-2.

1903 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agt</u>	<u>Pts</u>
OTTAWA Rough Riders	5	1	0	75	31	10
MONTREAL Football Club	4	2	0	78	43	8
OTTAWA COLLEGE	3	3	0	57	43	6
BRITANNIA Football Club	0	6	0	23	116	0

1903 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Percy Molson, Montreal	2	4	4	0	13	31
Hal Walters, Ottawa RR	6	0	0	0	1	25

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Jimmy Kerns, Ottawa College	6	0	0	0	0	24
Jimmy Craig, Montreal	3	0	0	0	1	13
Eddie Gleeson, Ottawa College	0	1	0	0	11	13

There was no Dominion Championship game this year. Upon hearing that the Hamilton Tigers won the ORFU title with the Burnside Rules, Ottawa stated they would play them only if the scrimmage game was enforced. Since neither side would change their view, the CRU had no choice but to cancel the championship game.

There were several interesting developments during the season. First of all, there was a practice at the AAA Grounds on September 21 under electric lights for the first time ever in the Quebec Rugby Football Union.

Secondly, Britannia had enough problems with fielding a strong team and called it quits. Some players who still wanted to play joined on with the Montreal club. In their place was the Westmount team.

And finally, there seemed to be some concerns on the value of the scrimmage game and possession of the ball in the Quebec Union. The Tom Clancy (of Ottawa) Rule was quite clear and supported by Mr. Herbert Molson, President of the Canadian Rugby Union in his letter dated September 26... "when one team has the ball and they are playing a running game, they must make five yards *on the third scrimmage* or kick the ball. If not they lose possession." This was a start toward opening the game and making the rules uniform but there still were some stumbling blocks. Discussion at the Annual General Meeting of the CRU to determine rules for the Dominion final got nowhere. The ORFU wanted the game played half under their rules and half under Quebec Union rules but the Quebecers refused to vote on the matter. As such both unions continued with their own rules.
