

# **THE QUEBEC RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION**

## **1883-1906 – Part 6**

By Robert Sproule

### **1904: THE COLLEGE MEN**

The opening game of the new season pitted the Rough Riders at Montreal. Right from the start Ottawa had a hard time containing the likes of the Molson boys, Walter and Percy. Both men were instrumental in giving Montreal good field position with their kicking and keeping the Riders at bay. Just before halftime a loose ball was picked up by Jimmy Craig and returned 90 full yards for the try to put Montreal ahead 14-0. Ottawa tried to make a game of it in the second half, scoring a few singles and a try but came up short 18-7 to a strong Montreal club.

At the same time at the Nations Capital, Westmount surprised the College team in their own park. Both teams struggled to gain control but Westmount scored first and broke for intermission in control and ahead 6-0. But in the second half the students gave veteran Joe Gleeson proper protection. His kicking first placed Boucher in position for a try. Then another punt resulted in a safety touch to put College ahead, and several more rouges won the game for them 11-6.

Even Montreal was surprised how strong this Westmount team was. Montreal scored first but the visitors came back with Baillie scoring his second try of the season. The convert and a rouge by Ross put Westmount ahead and in control 7-1. After the break they marched down the field ready to score again when an untimely fumble was picked up by Jimmy Craig and returned 100 yards for the score. When another march up the field was stalled, Westmount punted deep into Montreal territory. But on a pass from scrimmage, Jimmy Craig broke through the line and scored another try on an electrifying 70 yard dash. Montreal was up by two points but Westmount came back with Baillie scoring again for the lead. However, Walter Molson scored a try on a short run and a safety touch gave the hard fought contest to Montreal 15-11.

The first meeting between the two Ottawa teams went to the students. Both teams fumbled often and at the wrong times, setting up scoring plays for the other. One Rider fumble set up Walters for a try and then another was returned by O'Brien for four more points and College controlled the first half 9-0. Another loose ball gave O'Brien his record equalling second try on a fumble return. The Riders managed to return one College fumble for a major score but it was too late as Ottawa College doubled Ottawa City 14-7.

Everybody was having problems with Westmount and were outplayed and outscored in the first half. The Ottawa Rough Riders were no different and fell behind 10-6 at the intermission. But football was a 60 minute game and Westmount failed to stop the Ottawa-15 in the second half. As the game progressed Ottawa started to take control of the line and the game. Better blocking and passing combinations pushed Smith and Moore over the line. Several rouges and a fumble return by Robert Shillington cemented the victory and Ottawa came back to win 26-10.

It was the meeting for first place between Ottawa College and Montreal. In the first half Joe Gleeson's kicking scored rouges and set up Brennan for a fumble return try as College went up 8-1. But after the break Montreal came back with their own kicking game. First a well executed onside kick was caught by Murphy for a score and then another set up Lessor for a 10 yard run. The convert put Montreal ahead by three points. They confined Ottawa to a couple of rouges and took the contest and first place 11-10.

The Montreal-15 were ready for Westmount and came prepared to do battle. Neither side gained any advantage, the game bogged down to a battle of the lines. It was a hard and tough game by any standards. Two Montreal kicks led to their first half points; a safety touch and a short run by Percy Molson. Westmount managed a safety in the second half but fumbled badly too many times, giving up another safety and a fumble return by Herbert Molson for a 12-2 Montreal victory.

Ottawa College once again dominated the Riders. They scored four rouges, a safety touch and a try on a fumble return by Filion to lead 10-0 at the half. They contained the Riders in the last half, giving up a converted try and a rouge to win again 10-7.

The second meeting between College and Montreal was the turning point in the season for both teams. A Montreal win would clinch the season for them but an Ottawa win would tie them with the Quebec team. This time College totally controlled the Montrealers. The students simply outplayed the home team as all their kicks won it for them both on offense and defense. Montreal failed to get anything going and were kept on the defense the whole game. Play was mostly in their end and College could do no wrong. Single points, an onside kick and a safety gave them a shutout 11-0 and a tie for first place.

Westmount scored first in their Ottawa game on a converted try, but they allowed the Riders to come back and tie it at the half. After the break it was all Ottawa as they proved too strong. Their running game was in top gear and they controlled the wingline, opening holes at will. Five tries, including one on a fumble return, gave Ottawa 25 unanswered points and an easy win as they thumped Westmount 31-6.

Ottawa College had little problem with Westmount as by now they were a beaten team with several injuries. Joe Gleeson was the dominating force and the key factor in the student win. His play selection and kicking set up touchdown runs by Kearns, O'Brien and Hal Walters, and his four singles put his team into first place with the 18-1 score. Gleeson had the scoring title and a record 21 singles.

The season for Montreal came down to one final game with the Ottawa Rough Riders. A must win was needed to tie College for first place and force a playoff game. The teams traded kicks during the first half and the Riders were ahead by one point, 4-3 at intermission. Two tries by Art Moore was the turning point and the game for Ottawa as they added on to their score to defeat Montreal 13-5 and drop them into second place. The Riders, last years champions, managed to break even for the season at 3 and 3.

# THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 24, No. 1 (2002)

---

## 1904 FINAL STANDINGS

	W	L	T	For	Agt	Pts
OTTAWA COLLEGE	5	1	0	74	32	10
MONTREAL Football Club	4	2	0	61	54	8
OTTAWA Rough Riders	5	1	0	91	63	10
WESTMOUNT Football Club	0	6	0	36	113	0

## 1904 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Joe Gleeson, Ottawa College	0	1	0	0	21	23
Art Moore, Ottawa RR	4	0	0	0	1	17
O'Brien, Ottawa College	4	0	0	0	1	17
Alf Smith, Ottawa RR	2	0	1	0	6	16
Eddie Murphy, Ottawa RR	0	7	0	0	2	16

Again, there was no Dominion final. The Hamilton Tigers, winners of the Ontario Union, suggested that each team play a half under the others rules. But Ottawa College didn't know the Burnside Rules, would not have enough time to practice them, and would only play the CRU sanctioned scrimmage game.

At the Quebec Union AGM, Ottawa College announced that they had enough playing against the city teams and decided to join the Inter-Collegiate Union for next season. They felt that they had proven the superiority of the college game, winning six provincial championships and four Dominion titles in the past 11 seasons. In their place was the new St. Patrick's Saints club.

And much to the surprise of the football world, the Inter-Collegiate Rugby Football Union announced that they liked the ORFU downs system and voted to play the "*10 yards in three downs*" next year.

## 1905: RIDER POWER!

Westmount seemed to be making it a tradition by scoring first in all their games. The opening game of '05 was no different as they went up on the Ottawa Rough Riders 6-0 in the early stages of the game. But the Riders took advantage of slow returns by the Westmount backs and registered two safety touches. Two scoring runs by Smith and a rouge made it 13-6 at the break for Ottawa. The Riders dominated in the second half, completely controlling the game. Westmount scored a safety touch on a deep kick, but the game was Ottawa's 19-8.

Montreal scored first against the St. Patrick's team on a rouge and then an unconverted try. The Saints came back up the field and popped McCreadie over the line. The convert put them ahead 6-5 at the half. Two passing plays to Jimmy Craig for 20 yards and to Ernie Russell for 25 yards produced converted tries. The Saints tried to rally, but Craig's second try won the game for Montreal 21-8.

The October 7th game between Montreal and Westmount was a first. Both captains had agreed to play the game in quarters for the first time in the Quebec Union. Craig scored first for Montreal on a punt return, and Westmount scored a converted try in the second quarter to go up 6-5 at intermission. The rest of the game was all Montreal. McKenzie kicked three singles and Hammie Gordon scored a try in the third quarter. There was no scoring in the last quarter and Montreal doubled the Saints 12 to 6.

Ottawa had no problems with St. Patrick's. They scored two converted tries in the first half, including one by veteran Robert Shillington, gave the Saints 6 points on a single and a field goal, and then finished the game with another 12 points to defeat the other Ottawa club 24-6.

Against Westmount the Saints won their first game. They spotted Westmount a try on Shearer's fumble return in the first quarter. Two rouges and a goal-from-field by Slattery in the next quarter won them the game. There was no scoring in the third, and another single by Slattery in the fourth made it 8 to 4 for the Saints.

Ottawa scored two singles by Kennedy in the first quarter at their Montreal game. The Black & Red replied with a 20 yard scoring run by McKenzie before the teams changed ends. An onside kick put Ottawa ahead 6-5 at the break. But in the last two quarters Ottawa doubled Montreal's scoring to win the tight contest 12-8.

In their return game Westmount completely dominated the Saints. They scored a converted try on a fumble return in the first frame, added another 6 points on a short run by Shearer to lead 12-0 at intermission. A fumble return by Shearer, a converted run by Ross, and a pushover by Baillie made it 26-0. In the last quarter St. Pats finally got on the scoreboard, but it was too late as Westmount won 26-5.

Montreal was simply no match for the Riders in their October 21st meeting. The Montreal wingline was controlled on both sides of the line, and Ottawa moved the ball when they wanted and scored when they wanted. Art Moore's 10 yard touchdown run in the second quarter put the Riders ahead 6-1 at the half. A rouge in the third, two more in the fourth and a fumble return by Harvey Pulford gave Ottawa first place 13-1.

Ottawa was now starting to peak. Two converted tries and a rouge gave them a record 13 first quarter points against Westmount. They eased off in the second quarter with only a 30 yard touchdown run by Dick McGee. George Kennedy scored next for Ottawa, but Westmount tried to mount some form of an attack when Baillie went over the line. Phillips opened the last quarter with a 40 yard TD run and when Kennedy picked up a loose ball and was over the line for the final score, Ottawa had blasted the Montreal-based team 34-7.

Even against Montreal, Westmount failed to mount any effective offense. Montreal scored in and controlled each quarter before they allowed Baillie over the line. Hammie Gordon of Montreal was the star of the game. Two tries and three kicked points

# THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 24, No. 1 (2002)

---

was his production as his team beat up on their cross-town rivals 20-4.

It seemed the Saints were ready for the Riders. Time and time again they advanced up the field and booted the ball long and deep over the Ottawa line. Three singles put them up 3-0 after the first quarter. The Riders managed a rouge in the second but St. Pats came back in the third with a safety and another rouge by Freeland to lead 6-2 and in control. However, Ottawa finally got their passing game going and started to work through the Saints defense. Soon Dunning was over the line to tie the score. The convert put the Riders up by two. Several plays later, Pulford went over the line and the rout was on. Next was Rankin on a short run and finally LaFleur on a similar play. At the final whistle, the Saints were on the wrong end of a 24-6 score. They controlled the powerful Ottawa team for three full quarters but couldn't hold them in the last 15 minutes.

In the last game of the season, St. Patrick held Montreal to a safety touch and a 50 yard run by Jimmy Craig in the first quarter. In the second they replied with a safety, a try and a single to break at intermission ahead 7-6. The rest of the scoring was all Montreal and all in the third quarter. Jimmy Craig broke the game wide open with a brilliant 70 yard dash over the line. Walter Molson picked up a fumble and returned it over the line and then the "old one", Hedley Suckling, got the oval on a pass out, avoided the tacklers and placed the ball over the line 60 yards later. With the 25-7 victory, Montreal finished in second place.

## **1905 FINAL STANDINGS**

	W	L	T	For	Agt	Pts
OTTAWA Rough Riders	6	0	0	126	36	12
MONTREAL Football Club	4	2	0	87	50	8
WESTMOUNT Football Club	1	5	0	55	98	2
St. PATRICK Saints	1	5	0	40	124	2

## **1905 SCORING LEADERS**

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Harvey Pulford, Ottawa	6	2	0	0	0	28
Joe Rankin, Ottawa	1	9	0	0	1	23
Jimmy Craig, Montreal	5	0	0	0	1	21
Alf Smith, Ottawa	2	0	1	0	6	16
Sherer, Westmount	4	0	0	0	0	16

And now for the Dominion championship. The powerful Hamilton Tigers were ready to play half the game under Quebec Rules but there was a question. Ottawa was willing to play the title game in Ottawa or Montreal, but Hamilton wanted the game only in Hamilton. The CRU ordered Hamilton and Ottawa to play and the winner to play Varsity on November 18. The Tigers wired the CRU that they weren't going to play in Ottawa and the Canadian Union, trying to re-establish the game, banned the Tigers from the final. The University of Toronto (Varsity) was willing to play the Riders anywhere and thus the match took place at Rosedale field on November 25, in perfect fall football weather in front of 6,000 screaming fans.

Playing under Quebec Union Rules for the first half, Ottawa was out to win, using offside interference as much as possible, and the Referee allowed them to get away with it most of the time. Ten and one half minutes into the match Ottawa scored first and then, by a series of frequent bucks, worked the oval near the line. From five yards out Smith was over and the kick made it 7-0. In the second quarter Varsity kicked a rouge and then started to advance on the Rider line until, on a throw-in, Montague bucked through to make it 7-5 at the half.

In the second half, under Inter-Collegiate Rules, Referee Dalton was more strict on the offside interference, and the Riders were penalized more often. They pressured on every kick until McInnes was forced to concede a safety. Ottawa led 9-5. Now the winglines started to control the other and neither side was allowed to break away. And then in the fourth quarter, a surprise move by Captain Casey Baldwin gave Varsity the game and the Title. With minutes left in the game, Toronto had the ball some 20 yards out, and short rushes brought the ball within five yards of Ottawa's goalline. Varsity was awarded a free kick. The Riders felt that if they couldn't get the ball out they would concede a safety and still win by two points. Casey touched the oval with his foot, recovered the loose ball, and wiggled through the line for the try as Ottawa watched. Lailey converted and Varsity had the Dominion Championship 11-9.

## **1906: MONTREAL FOOTBALL CLUB**

In the opening game it was suppose to be another Montreal win, but St. Patrick's had other ideas. When the rain came in the second quarter Montreal failed to adjust. Pats, already ahead on Alf Smith's field goal 5-2, scored another 8 points before the half. Montreal managed only singles in the next half and lost their only match of the season 13-7.

Ottawa and Westmount battled 7-7 in the first half. Then Jack Williams and his educated toe got the Riders moving. He kicked two field goals and a free kick, and one of his punts led to a fumble that Sherrif scored on. Westmount tried to make a game of it, but their porous defense failed to hold the Black & Red. At the final whistle the Riders had the game 31-14.

Inspired by their recent win, the Riders were all over Montreal in the next game. Again it was Jack Williams with three rouges, as Ottawa took a commanding 3-0 lead at the break. A run by Percy Roberts in the third quarter put Montreal ahead 5-3, but veteran George Kennedy regained the lead for the Riders with his scoring run. A short 20 yard punt return by Murphy gave the game to Montreal, and two Ernie Russell rouges made the final score 12-8 Montreal.

Westmount and St. Pats were two teams that were going nowhere and were reasonably equal in strength, although the Saints would finish the season as the better of the two. There was no scoring in the first quarter and the teams basically traded try and rouges for the rest of the game. It was 6 all at the half and finished as an uneventful 12-12 tie.

Ottawa found that the Saints had a tough and rugged defense that shut down their running game. Of course Ottawa did the

# THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 24, No. 1 (2002)

---

same, but the Riders had a superior kicker in Jack Williams. Kicking for eight points, including a goal from-the-field, Ottawa led in the first three quarters before the Saints got on the scoreboard. There was no scoring in the fourth and Ottawa took the easy game 10-1.

There was not much Westmount could do against Montreal. Jimmy Craig and Percy Molson scored first quarter tries and Montreal was happy with a 11-0 halftime score. After the intermission Montreal ran all over the weak Westmount wingline. They score a record 24 third quarter points and blasted the “*other Montreal team*” 40-0. Walter Molson was the star of the game with a try and three goals-from-trys.

It was the second meeting of Montreal and Ottawa, and the winner would certainly take first place. A kick by Ottawa put Montreal deep in their own territory, and the Riders were thinking of getting good field position for at least another Jack Williams goal-from-field. But a pass out to Percy Molson broke him loose and he scampered 70 yards for the winning score. The Riders came back with two rouges but for all purposes the game was over, and all in the first quarter. Montreal scored another 8 points and had a comfortable 13-2 lead at intermission. Ernie Russell kicked a rouge in the third and then added a 40 yarder in the fourth to hand Montreal first place 19-4.

It was going to be Alf Smith Day for the Saints when they replayed Westmount. The Saints took the lead on two singles kicked by Alf. Westmount came back on a rouge and a try to lead 6-2 after the first quarter. A goal-from-field by Alf in the second gave the Saints a 7-6 lead at the break. In the third Alf scored a try and set up two more by teammate Joe Gleeson. There was no scoring in the last quarter and St. Pats won handily 23-6.

It was the revenge Montreal was waiting for ever since they lost the opener to the Saints. And revenge it was. So outplayed by a superior team that by the early moments of the second quarter St. Pats appeared to be that of a groggy boxer...unaware where the next strike was coming from and blindly trying to get in a weak, spiritless hit.

Montreal toyed with the Pats in the first quarter and led 5-0. Then, in the second quarter, Kingston returned a fumble by Alf Smith and the slaughter was on. Tries by Jack Savage and Jimmy Craig and two safety touches for a record 20 points made it 25-0 at the half. Montreal slacked off a bit in the third, scoring only 13 points, but allowed Old Man Joe Gleeson to kick three singles for the Saints. A record 34 points in the fourth quarter on 5 tries and several singles made the final score 72-3 for Montreal! Ernie Russell had the most points on two tries and a single for 11 points. Then came Jimmy Craig with 10 points and Walter Molson with another ten, including 5 converts. He would have kicked more if the wind had not blown the ball off course. The points and 11 tries were the most ever scored in a Quebec Union game and one of the highest in Canadian football history.

And while Montreal was slaughtering the Saints, the Ottawa Rough Riders were blasting Westmount at the Capital on the same Saturday. The Rider wingline controlled both sides of the ball from the opening kickoff. Westmount failed to hold the Rider charge and their plays were stopped before they got their passes off. Ottawa, on the other hand, worked their combination plays to perfection and turned these plays into major points. Ottawa scored 11 tries in all with LaFleur scoring two on identical 70 yard runs. Dick McGee started the scoring with a beautiful 65 yard run for a major. Williams added another 12 points and in the second quarter they scored another 12 points to break at the half 29-5. A record 27 third quarter points and another 13 in the last frame made the final a lop-sided 72-7 for Ottawa. Jack Williams was the hero of the game with two tries, two goals-from-field, 2 singles and a record 7 goals-from-trys, for an astounding 29 points!

Against St. Patrick Ottawa held back on their game a bit. Williams only scored 13 points but the Riders ran up another big score. The saints were not in the game. Badly beaten by Montreal the week before, they realized early in the contest that it was going to be another bad outing. The Riders ran all over them time and time again and returned their punts for big gains. Five tries and several singles made it 31-0 at the half. Twelve more points in the third, compared to two Joe Gleeson rouges, made the final score 43-2 for Ottawa and second place.

Montreal captured first place for the first time since 1898 after several years at second, with an uninteresting match against Westmount. Runs by Percy Roberts and Hammie Gordon made it 12-0 at the intermission. Westmount started to rally on a Joe Ross try in the third, but Montreal added two rouges and a converted try to control the game. At the final whistle Montreal had the easy game 20-6.

## 1906 FINAL STANDINGS

	W	L	T	For	Agt	Pts
MONTREAL Football Club	6	0	0	170	34	10
OTTAWA Rough Riders	4	2	0	165	55	8
St. PATRICK Saints	2	3	1	54	150	5
WESTMOUNT Football Club	0	5	1	45	195	1

## 1906 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Jack Williams, Ottawa	3	11	1-1	5	16	73
Ernie Russell, Montreal	3	0	0	0	18	33
Walter Molson, Montreal	3	10	0	0	0	25
Alf Smith, St. Patricks	1	0	0	2	7	22
Jimmy Craig, Montreal	3	0	0	0	6	21

Montreal was a high scoring, tough, and well-disciplined team, allowing less than 6 points a game while scoring 170 points. They scored 26 tries for the season, 23 by the run, and kicked a record 26 singles. They placed 5 players in the Top-Ten for scoring, including Ernie Russell, with three tries and 18 singles.

If the Hamilton Tigers, the ORFU champs, wanted to play in the national final, said the Canadian Rugby Union, then they would have to play the scrimmage game – first against Montreal and then McGill – and most followers were looking forward to an all-Quebec final.

However, Hamilton had other plans. They were no doubt the best team in Canada this year, as well as the past three years, and were never in serious danger of losing this game. They quickly mastered the scrimmage game on

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 24, No. 1 (2002)

---

offense, and played a punting game the first quarter that kept Montreal completely off guard. Several kicks over the line by Ben Simpson and a safety made it 8-0 for Hamilton at one point, but Montreal came back in the second quarter on a fumble return to make it 8-6 at the half. Neither side could buck the line against the other, but the Tigers rounded the corners better. From that point on the Tigers defense controlled the Montreal line and their speedy backs. The Black & Red failed to control the outside runs of Art Moore or the splendid long punts by Simpson. Two more rouges in the third and another in the fourth made the final a Tiger win 11-6.

In fact, in the CRU game, so strong were the Tigers that they completely overpowered the favorite McGill-15. Hamilton broke through the line time and time again and stopped the Redmen halfbacks just as they received the ball. The Gold and Black led from the start. Liz Marriott scored twice on two McGill fumbles and Art Moore scored once on a short 15 yard run. It was 15-0 after the first quarter, 25-2 at the half and a CRU final of 29-3 for the Tigers. Neither Montreal team was in their game and the Tigers were indeed Canada's best.

### **Aftermath**

There were new changes for the Quebec Union for the 1907 season. First of all, at the Annual General Meeting, Westmount announced it was leaving to become an Intermediate ORFU team. Ottawa and St. Pats were amalgamating to become a stronger team and were considering joining the newly proposed Inter-Provincial Rugby Football Union with Hamilton and Toronto. Later, when Montreal joined, that was the end of the Quebec Rugby Football Union as far as senior competition was concerned.

But all was not dead with football in Montreal. In the new IRFU (Big-4 as it was eventually called), Montreal finished in first place and won the CRU championship against the Peterboro Quakers team 75-10. But then misfortune befell the team as they finished dead last in the IRFU for seven of the next eight seasons. In 1919 the Montreal Football Club was no more, but the Montreal Amature Athletic Association fielded a team and took first place under the power running of Moe Hercovitch. It was going to be an all-Quebec affair with McGill, but the students would not play, citing examinations.

In 1937 several Intermediate teams formed a senior division of the Quebec Rugby Football Union and challenged for the Grey Cup. The Westmount Mounties finished in first place but were soundly thrashed by the Sarnia Imperials 63-0 in the semi-finals. There was not another senior division until 1943 when, during the Second World War, only the Quebec and Ontario Unions registered with the CRU to challenge for the Grey Cup. The Lachine RCAF team finished in first place and appeared to be a heavy favorite. However, they lost the Inter-Union playoffs to the Hamilton Flying Wildcats 7-6 in a tight game.

The following year with the war still on, the HMCS Donnacona Combines finished first in the Quebec Union by defeating the McGill Redmen and the Verdun Grads. The underdog Combines were the last Quebec Rugby Football Union senior team to win the Grey Cup by defeating Joe Krol and the Hamilton Flying Wildcats 7-6.

With the end of the war the next year, and the return of players to the Big-4, football was as popular as ever in the province. But the Quebec Union could not compete with the IRFU in senior competition as football in Quebec was football in Montreal. And without Montreal to attract the fans, the QRFU had finally died and left the pages of Canadian football history.

References: "Early Football in Ontario" by Ian Speers, September 2000