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Inside This Issue

The Vancouver Grizzlies by
James Paul Garrison

1

Message from the President
by Paul Bruno

2

Editor's Comments

3

Empire Stadium
by James Paul Garrison

8

The 1955 Grey Cup Game
by James Paul Garrison

12

Society News

18

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The Vancouver Grizzlies

By James Paul Garrison

The Lions have carried the championship hopes of West-coast football fans since they debuted in the Western Conference in 1954, but that role had previously been filled - quite briefly, by another team, providing the people of Vancouver with a bright light during a very dark time. The Western Interprovincial Football Union had managed to survive the economic hardships of the 1930s, but lost one of its member teams when the Edmonton Eskimos folded following the 1939 season. The 1940 campaign saw its three remaining teams – Calgary Bronks, Regina Roughriders and Winnipeg Blue Bombers compete for Western gridiron glory. At the end of the season, the Bronks traveled to Vancouver for an exhibition game against the Vancouver Bulldogs All Stars. The game was organized by I.A. “Tiny” Radar, an electrical engineer, who was involved with the Bulldogs team and Jim Coleman, a sports writer for the Vancouver Province newspaper. With moral backing from Province sports editor Hal Straight, the two had persuaded brewery owner, George Norgan to lend them \$1000 to cover the Bronks’ transportation and accommodation expenses. The game was played at Athletic Park; a small stadium situated on the Fairview slopes on the south side of False Creek, with 3,000 spectators in attendance. The Bulldogs – made up entirely of amateur players, was no match for the semi-pro Calgary team, who won 36-11, but the game itself was a success and the modest profit from the ticket sales paid the dental bills of the Vancouver players.

Bolstered by the success of the exhibition game, Coleman and Radar set out to enter a Vancouver team in the Western Conference for the 1941 season. In early April a meeting was held in the auditorium at the Province building across from Victory Square, attracting almost 100 people, 50 of whom bought \$10 memberships in the team. Norgan took on the responsibilities of president, while Chuck Jones, who had just returned to Vancouver from a stint as manager of the Harlem Globetrotters, became the team’s manager. An executive committee of

con’t on page 4

Message from the President

Well, after months of anticipation, CFL fans are finally on the verge of watching a very historically significant season unfold. Yes, it's the third season since we've been formed, and oh yes, it is a season where the 100th Grey Cup Game is to be played and celebrated across Canada.

I would like to take a moment to discuss the cross-Canada theme.

Our organization certainly aspires to reach out to members from coast to coast.

At the same time certain elements of organizational infrastructure and working relationships with key parties involved in Canadian Football continue to be nurtured.

As noted in my previous message, some of these relationships are with different arms of the CFL Executive, primarily with the Marketing and Statistical arms. We continue to have opportunities to have an impact in both areas.

Similarly, a strong working relationship has been carved with the CFL Alumni and the Hall of Fame.

However, the fact remains that most of our members still reside in Ontario. The only reason that this remains so is that the group was founded here and the original members felt that we had to grow through our local contacts and forge these aforementioned, key working relationships, which also reside in Ontario.

Most recently, I reached out to our current Western members with my expressed desire to help us reach out across Canada, to all fans of Canadian football. As a result of that communication, John Valentine (B.C.) and Jack Morrow (Alberta) have stepped forward with their thoughts in growing our national membership. I applaud them and wish them much success and pledge my support for their efforts. Thank you, gentlemen!

We need to market ourselves as a conduit for interested fans to find like-minded individuals and foster an element of commonality in interest, and indeed, passion for the game.

Again, using Ontario as a template for our growth, a group of us recently went to a ceremony at Rosedale Field, the site of the first Grey Cup game. Amid the events of that day, a plaque commemorating the site's significance was unveiled. We made some key contacts and one of the most significant was with senior Argo Executive staff.

We were able to make a good enough impression there that we are now in position to follow up with the Argos and hopefully position ourselves to gain some level of access to their fan base.

In a similar vein, we were a presence at the Toronto Argonauts Family Day on June 23 at the University of Toronto Mississauga Training Camp. Our own Lori Bursey has been a champion of the Argo cause as she oversees the Friends of the Argonauts, a significant fan club of the

team. We took the time to tell many visitors of the intent of the CFRS to become a significant organization for Canadian Football fans and hope that many of those visitors consider joining us.

These are the types of events and opportunities, which current CFRS members need to exploit, for lack of a better word, in order to look at some ways to grow our numbers., particularly westward.

Hopefully, this description of some recent events, gives you ideas to attract more members to our group.

Of course, we have to show new members that we are planning to make great strides toward our stated goals.

A key element in that regard is the reworking of a meaningful website, that can properly house our research and tell our story to all visitors. I am happy to report that I have enlisted the aid of a company to work with the CFRS Executive in the creation of a brand new website, which we expect to reveal later this summer.

Once that's complete, we hope to turn it into a one-stop shot for every Canadian Football fan.

Finally, I encourage each of you to think of ways to communicate our intentions to prospective members and to also share news of your individual research efforts.

Editor's Comments

Thank you to all those who submitted articles for this issue of the *CFRS Flying Wing* newsletter. The newsletter is for you, the CFRS members, and can only succeed with your support so please continue to keep sending in the "cards and letters". After all, if you don't we'll be forced to remove your name from the Christmas card list. Seriously, if you like the thought of having a CFRS newsletter then let's make it happen. It is here for you.

Regarding articles, we are open to any and all articles, in an MS WORD format, from the CFRS membership and if you are laying on the couch wondering what you could write about consider this, given that our society name includes the word "research", you may want to get on down to your local library and pull out some of the "old" newspapers and start jotting down some notes related to Canadian football history. Topics that you may want to keep in mind for consideration as the basis for your article could be about your favorite team, player, era, season etc etc. Have at it, it is all fair game and I know our membership has the skillset to make it happen.

Lastly, please be aware we will be keeping track of the research efforts and projects being worked on by our membership (see the "Society News" section of the newsletter), so please do not be afraid to let me know about your upcoming articles and books etc.

Comments, positive or negative, regarding the newsletter may be sent to the editor at; bdmstmarys@rogers.com.

con't from page 1

over 50 people was also formed, which debated several different nicknames, such as Cougars, Wolves and Seals, before settling on the nickname, Grizzlies.

War news from overseas was impossibly bleak, with much of Europe already under Nazi rule and the Chinese fighting a bitter war against Japan, which cast a dark shadow over daily life, even in faraway Vancouver. Rationing meant a shortage of supplies and enlistment meant a shortage of young men – it was a difficult time to be fielding a football team. By the summer, Calgary Bronks had folded and the Roughriders appeared destined to follow, but in late July the Grizzlies received a certified cheque from Regina, guaranteeing the Roughriders' participation and a 1941 season. The Grizzlies hired former University of Wisconsin star Greg Kabat, who had played the previous eight seasons in Winnipeg, as a player/coach.

Kabat arrived in Vancouver during the first week of August, accompanied by Bill Heindl, a fullback whom he'd coached at St. Paul's College in Winnipeg. The deal to bring him to Vancouver would pay him \$2000 for the season, but in addition to playing for and coaching the Grizzlies, he would also work as a teacher/coach at Vancouver College.

Kabat was said to look like a mind-mannered math teacher with his neat hair and glasses, but had a reputation for toughness and a foul mouth that had earned him the nickname, 'Hardrock'. His temper was on display at the team's first practice at Heather Park a few days later when 25 hopefuls tried out for the team, "If you play it like that, the boys will kick your teeth in - and if they don't I will" he was quoted in the next day's Province, as telling the players. With the team's first game just over a month away, and putting together a squad from scratch, Kabat would have his work cut out for him. He signed several players from the previous year's Bulldogs, including backs, Garnie Smith and Jack Labelle, end, Stan Laycock, and linemen, Joe Budnick, Joe Keyes, and Eric Smith, but with 35% of the team in the military, the talent pool was limited. With Calgary not fielding a team, he managed to sign six former Bronks: linemen, Mort Van Ostrand, Chuck Millman, Gordon Gelhaye and Dave "Steaky" Adams, end, Larry Haynes and back, Jimmy Gilkes. The roster was filled out with local players who had experience playing junior football including backs, Sam Caros, Johnny Goranko and Jack Horne as well as linemen, Hank Smith and Bob Ellison. Bill Murphy, a 17 year old back who was a student at Vancouver College also signed on, as well as lineman Jack Eaton, a firefighter who was said to have had no prior experience as a player. One of the players – 'Moon' Cameron had been standing on the sidelines in a suit, watching the first practice, when he was reluctantly called into service to fill in at the guard position. The team's roster would also include linemen, Burdette Kindred, Art Freburg and Bob Campbell, all of whom commuted from Washington State to participate. The team's roster would vary over the course of the season, and while a few of the players received a modest salary, most of them simply played for the love of the game.

Practices consisted of running plays and learning signals for the first few weeks, but in early September with the team's first game just over a week away, Kabat began conducting full contact practices, making it clear to the players that the games would be much rougher. The hitting in practice began to take its toll however, and with the opener a few days away, Kabat halted scrimmage to allow the injured players to heal. The Grizzlies played their first game on Saturday September 13 at Athletic Park against the Regina Roughriders in front of

approximately 3000 fans. The team's booster club held a ceremony before the game, which featured two bands and an honour guard of cadets from Vancouver College. Alderman Charley Jones kicked the ceremonial opening kick-off, while George Norgan held the ball for him. The Grizzlies, clad in gold jerseys with red pants and helmets, were off to a promising start when Larry Haynes returned the opening kick-off 27 yards and into Regina territory. This was followed on their opening play by an incomplete Bill Heindl pass that would likely have resulted in a touchdown, but the drive ended with a Kabat field goal attempt that fell short. Mother nature held both teams back, as a downpour prevented many forward passes or end runs, limiting both teams to line plunging and kicking. Regina managed to exploit the inexperience of the Grizzlies by running a sleeper play and later faking a kick before throwing a forward pass. All of the game's points were scored by kicking, and Regina won 4-1.

The rematch was held two days later in the rain with a cold wind blowing off False Creek. Once again the kicking game contributed to the scoring, but this time with a twist. The Roughriders struggled to field Jack Labelle's punts and in the second quarter a long punt sailed over the Regina goal line, where returner, Norman Geller was grounded by Stan Laycock and Chuck Millman for a Vancouver safety touch. In the third quarter Regina's Jim Kinney juggled a high punt from Labelle, before dropping it. Vancouver's Bill Murphy fell on it for a first down at the Regina 7-yard line. An offside penalty against Regina moved the Grizzlies closer before Jack Horne plunged over teammate Gordon Gelhaye for a touchdown. Kabat missed the extra point. The fourth quarter was a thriller: the Grizzlies led 7-1, but Regina rallied and surprised the Grizzlies' defence with a run around left end by Ray Powell for 35 yards to score a touchdown, which were worth five points at the time. The Roughriders were set to tie the game with the convert, but Toar Springsteen's kick was wide. Momentum was in Regina's favour as they worked their way into Vancouver territory once again, only to fumble on the Grizzlies' ten-yard line. The Grizzlies secured the 7-6 win.

With a respectable 1-1 record under their belts, the Grizzlies would now set out on a physically gruelling road trip. Budget constraints and war rationing necessitated that all of their away games be played on a single trip, forcing the team to play four games in nine days. The Grizzlies departed on the 8:15 PM train on September 17, occupying an entire Canadian Pacific sleeper car. Kabat eased his discipline on the team during the trip, insisting that players be in bed by midnight and up by 9:30 AM. As the train passed through the Rockies, they encountered snow in Lake Louise. One of the railroad porters rubbed snow on his face for good luck, and was soon followed by the Grizzlies' receivers. Kabat announced in a press conference aboard the train that the team would employ the forward pass more during the coming games. He scheduled a practice during a stop in Field, BC, but was irate when the C.P.R. refused to hold up the train for a full scrimmage. The Grizzlies arrived in Regina on the morning of September 19 and played the Roughriders at Park De Young (later renamed Taylor Field) that evening. The Riders were a much-improved team from what they had been four days earlier in Vancouver. Fumbles and interceptions hampered the Grizzlies efforts and most of the game was played within their 40-yard line. While Jimmy Gilkes, Garnie Smith and Jack Labelle handled the ball adeptly, the Grizzlies didn't make serious progress into Regina territory until the fourth quarter, on a drive that ended in an interception. The Roughriders handed the injured and travel-weary Grizzlies an 18-0 loss.

The following morning the Grizzlies took a train to Winnipeg for their first game against Kabat's former teammates. Neither Kabat nor Joe Keyes would suit up for the game due to injuries, while Garnie Smith and Jack Labelle would play but with bumps and bruises from the previous game. Kabat was able to take some comfort in the fact that the Blue Bombers' star halfback, Fritz Hansen would also sit out the game due to injury. The Grizzlies had many supporters amongst the Osborne Stadium crowd, and played more competitive ball than they had three days earlier, keeping up with the Bombers during the first half. Late in the second quarter, Vancouver's Al Pollock recovered a blocked Winnipeg kick, resulting in a drive that ended with an incomplete end zone pass to Larry Haynes on the last play of the half. The Grizzlies' hopes were dashed again late in the second half after Garnie Smith gained 20 yards on an end run, which likely would have set-up a touchdown had the clock not run out. The Grizzlies lost again 18-0.

The Grizzlies had two days before their next game and much of that time was spent having injuries examined by doctors and attending a luncheon and cinemas as guests of some of the local citizens. Once the city of Winnipeg had shown its hospitality, the city's football team attempted to secure sole possession of first place. The Osborne Stadium field was muddy following two days of rain, but the Grizzlies' performance was an improvement from the previous game. Fritz Hansen had returned to the Blue Bomber line-up and the Winnipeg offence was up and running from the opening play, driving deep into the Grizzlies' territory where they were stopped by the Vancouver defence on the three-yard line. Taking possession, the Grizzlies attempted a complicated reverse play, but Garnie Smith fumbled behind the line of scrimmage, where it was recovered by Winnipeg's Les Lear, and followed two plays later by a touchdown from Winnipeg's Andy Beiber. Hansen increased Winnipeg's lead in the second quarter with a major of his own. The Grizzlies answered by gaining 50 yards in four plays before Kabat caught a pass in the Winnipeg end zone, marking the first time Winnipeg had been scored upon in 1941. Early on, the Winnipeg line had overwhelmed the Grizzlies, but the Vancouver linemen soon dug in against their rivals, blocking kicks, knocking down passes and recovering fumbles. In the end the Blue Bombers prevailed with a 12-5 victory, but Winnipeg team president, Frank Hannibal was so impressed with the Grizzlies' play for a first-year team, that he visited them at their hotel afterward to compliment them personally.

The trip back to the coast began with a return to Regina for a rematch against the Roughriders. Playing in a biting cold wind, the Grizzlies were once again hampered by injuries with both Kabat and Gilkes playing hurt and Garnie Smith on the bench. Johnny Goranko and Bill Heindl handled most of the passing for the Grizzlies while Jack Labelle struggled with little protection as he tried to get kicks away. The Grizzlies' only points came on a safety touch as the Roughriders won 22-2, ending any hopes the Grizzlies may have had of making the playoffs. The Grizzlies returned to the coast and had a week to nurse their injuries before their next game – an exhibition match at Athletic Park against a U.S. Army team from Ft. Lewis, Washington. To accommodate the differences between Canadian and American football, the first half of the game was played under American rules and the second half, Canadian. Ft. Lewis boasted a roster that featured several former college stars and were said to be competitive with the best teams in the Pacific Northwest. Despite the level of talent however, the Ft. Lewis team struggled to hang on to the ball, while the Grizzlies' line provided little protection in the first half. The only scoring in the game occurred when Kabat made it past several blockers to knock down an Army kick at the Ft. Lewis 10-yard line and teammate Larry Haynes scooped up the loose ball and ran it in for the

touchdown. With converted touchdowns given a value of seven points for the game, the Grizzlies won 7-0.

Following their victory over Ft. Lewis, the Grizzlies had 11 days before their next game. During that time Kabat and the players hosted a clinic in which nearly 100 children were taught football skills. The Grizzlies met the Blue Bombers at Athletic Park on Thanksgiving Monday in the rain. The Blue Bombers were on a road trip similar to the one the Grizzlies had recently returned from, with two games scheduled in Regina and two in Vancouver. During the first half, the Grizzlies struggled to hang on to the ball, and fumbled a lateral in their backfield, which Fritz Hansen recovered and turned into a touchdown. The Grizzlies managed to hold the Bombers for most of the first half, while Winnipeg's Art Stevenson kicked two long singles. During the second half, Vancouver's Jack Horne injured his neck and Stevenson, a medical student, refused to let anyone move him until professional help arrived. The Blue Bombers dominated in the second half and the Grizzlies lost 17-0. The Grizzlies' final game of the W.I.F.U. season came two days later and was again played in the rain on a muddy field, hampering the running game. The game was scoreless for the first three and a half quarters and the Blue Bombers tried to put points on the board by kicking rouges, but the Grizzlies ran the ball out of the end zone. Jack Labelle aided the Grizzlies' struggle for field position by making 50-yard kicks, but the Grizzlies failed to put points on the board. Late in the game the Bombers scored two touchdowns off turnovers to win the game 12-0 and clinch first place.

The Grizzlies played one more game in 1941 when they faced off against the U.B.C. Thunderbirds on October 25 at Varsity Stadium on the U.B.C. campus. The game was the University's homecoming game, and would be the only football game U.B.C. would play in 1941, due to the war effort. Mort Van Ostrand, a member of the Grizzlies who was also attending U.B.C., suited up for the T-Birds, who offered the Grizzlies impressive competition. Jimmy Gilkes scored the Grizzlies' first touchdown, which was converted by Greg Kabat, while Jack Horne threw a touchdown pass to Norm Trasolini for the second major, which was also converted by Kabat. For their part, the T-Birds held the Grizzlies scoreless in the third quarter, due in large part to the kicking of Ray Gorman. Gorman also threw a touchdown pass to Bud Fairgreaves to put U.B.C. on the scoreboard. The Grizzlies won 12-5.

The 1941 season ended with the Blue Bombers defeating the Ottawa Rough Riders to win the Grey Cup. While the Grizzlies only won a single league game, two of their players - tackle Gordon Gelhaye and end Larry Haynes, were selected to the Canadian Press Western All-Star team. But with the end of the football season came increased conflict from across the Pacific, as the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and expanded their conquest of Asia. The W.I.F.U ceased operations for the duration of the war and the Vancouver Grizzlies faded into history. At war's end the Western Conference resumed play, but Vancouver would not participate again until the birth of the B.C. Lions nearly a decade later.

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Empire Stadium

By James Paul Garrison

Vancouver was granted a franchise for the Western Inter-provincial Football Union for 1954, with the requirement that 6,500 season tickets be sold, travel expenses for visiting teams be guaranteed, and that the team play its home games in a stadium with a seating capacity of at least 15,000. Over 8,000 season tickets were sold, at \$28 for eight home games and as luck would have it, Vancouver was also chosen as the site for the 1954 British Empire Games, which would necessitate the building of a stadium for its events.

A referendum was held, and Vancouver voters supported building a stadium with several proposals being put forward as a location, including Lansdowne Park in nearby Richmond, and the University of British Columbia. The U.B.C. proposal was defeated because the University didn't want a stadium with a seating capacity exceeding 8,000, and traffic problems on campus were another issue. It was finally decided that a stadium would be built at the southeast corner of Hastings Park, adjacent to the Pacific National Exhibition. Annis Stukus, who had taken the job as Head Coach and General Manager of the new football team, had a look at the plans that had been drawn up for the stadium. The budget didn't allow for dressing rooms, lights or a roof, and the East side bleachers would be temporary, and would be taken down after the Empire Games ended. The stadium, as proposed was insufficient.

As an alternative, Stukus approached the ownership of Capilano Breweries who owned Capilano Stadium (now known as Nat Bailey Stadium) and the Vancouver Capilanos, a baseball team in the Pacific Northwest League, about expanding the stadium. The stadium would then serve as home field for the new football team, the Lions and would also be large enough to allow the Capilanos to play in the Pacific Coast league, which had teams in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego.

The expansion of Capilano Stadium would be unnecessary. The PNE Board of Directors, The British Empire Games Committee and Vancouver City Council worked together on a solution, which expanded the budget and the amount of land the stadium would use. The new Stadium would have the all the facilities needed for the Empire Games and the BC Lions. When it was completed, Empire Stadium was the biggest and best stadium in the country. The first proposals had called for a temporary facility costing \$500,000, but the completed stadium cost \$1.5 million.

The British Empire Games opened on July 30. The highlight of the games was the running of a race that came to be known as the "Miracle Mile". Englishman, Roger Bannister had made history at Oxford in May of that year when he recorded the time 3:59.4, becoming the first runner in history to run a mile in under four minutes. The next month, an Australian, John Landy ran a sub-four minute mile in Finland, and the two runners would compete face to face at the Empire Games on August 7. The race was dramatic, with Bannister edging out Landy in the final stretch, and was a major international story. In an age before satellite technology, and with television in its infancy, footage of the race was flown to England on a Royal Air Force jet, and

shown to British viewers only hours after the runners crossed the finish line. The story was also featured in the first issue of Sports Illustrated.

On Wednesday August 11, 1954, during the week following the closing of the Empire Games, the Lions played an exhibition game against the Montreal Alouettes at Empire Stadium. More than 19,000 fans attended – at the time a record attendance for football in Western Canada. The Lions lost that game, 22-0, and lost every other game that season but one: a 9–4 defeat of the Calgary Stampeders. The fans were so excited by the win, that they crowded the field after the game and tore down the goal posts. One woman fainted and another was hit on the head by a flying bottle. During the season ticket drive, Stukus had encouraged fans to try to snap up the first 11,000 seats, to ensure they were seated under cover. Those fans surely thanked themselves later, when six of the eight home games were played in the rain. The field turned to a quagmire, and the players were given tetanus shots because the field had gone sour. In the documentary series, “CFL Traditions”, Norm Fieldgate who played for the Lions at the time, pointed out that the mud slowed the faster runners down, “I didn’t get up to their speed, they came down to my speed”.

Vancouver managed to secure the Grey Cup game in 1955 due to the fact that Empire Stadium was larger than Varsity Stadium in Toronto, where the game was normally played. The ’55 Grey Cup game would be the first played in Western Canada, and Empire Stadium’s field was dug up to try to solve its drainage problems. The specifications for the field had called for crushed gravel as the base, with drainage pipes underneath, but what workers found were boulders instead of gravel and drainage pipes that weren’t connected to anything. Prior to construction of the stadium, the site had been a golf course, and a stream had run through where the 55-yard line was now situated.

During a trip to Toronto to attend meetings, Annis Stukus and Dave Dauphinee, who managed Empire Stadium, attended a hockey game at Maple Leaf Gardens. They were in the lobby at the end of the first intermission, and instead of heading back to their seats, Stukus asked Dauphinee to wait. A crew came out and swept and cleaned the lobby. Stukus pointed out to Dauphinee that a crew cleaned the arena before the game, during intermissions and after the game. Before every game at Empire Stadium, a crew of 50 cleaned the stadium of garbage and cigarette butts. Stukus boasted that the Lions had the highest percentage of women in attendance at any professional sporting event in the world.

Empire Stadium was located in the heart of a residential neighborhood. Lions Kicker, Lui Passaglia and Bob Lenarduzzi, who played soccer for the Vancouver Whitecaps, both grew up near the stadium, and have recalled in interviews how they could hear the stadium crowds from their front yards. If the crowds were noisy, they knew the home team was winning, but if it was quiet, they were losing. Norm Fieldgate described how the cantilevered roof caused the noise to shoot out onto the field: “ You knew if you did things wrong, and you knew if you did things right”. Defensive Tackle, Emery Barnes preferred the atmosphere at Empire Stadium to some of the larger stadiums he had played in during his college career in the U.S. “It was almost as though the fans were on the field”, he said years later. Joe Kapp described the stadium as a thing of beauty, recalling the smell of hot dogs wafting into the stadium during the P.N.E. “It was a very special place, and outdoors – you play football outdoors – I don’t care if it’s raining.”

The field's drainage problems continued and in 1964, the field was once again uncovered to determine the source of the problems. The drainage system was deemed to be fine, but clay under the turf was blocking water from getting to the pipes. In 1970, the track was replaced, and the grass field was replaced with artificial turf. The 400-meter Olympic track was covered by synthetic resin 3/8" thick with a rough surface. The new field was formed by pouring a 3/4" thick layer of the resin over a thick asphalt base, then covering it with tartan turf. The field crowned 22" higher in the center to allow water to run off to drainage ditches between it and the track. The Lions were outfitted with new footwear designed to grip the new turf. In exchange for City Council covering the \$900,000 cost, the P.N.E. agreed to surrender its lease to Callister Park, an amateur sports facility across Renfrew Street from Hastings Park. Callister Park was then turned into an open recreation park.

In 1971, the stadium was the site of the first Grey Cup game played on artificial turf, one of seven Grey Cup games to be played there between 1955 and 1974. The stadium became home to the Vancouver Whitecaps of the North American Soccer League, the Simon Fraser University Clansmen football team, high school football championships and track meets as well as major concerts, including Elvis Presley in 1957 and the Beatles in 1964.

The decline of Empire Stadium began in the 1970s. A study in 1976 showed damage to concrete sections by the rusting reinforcing steel in the concrete. This had been caused by calcium chloride, which was added to the concrete to speed up the setting process, acting with water and rusting the reinforcing steel, causing it to swell and break the surrounding concrete. The stadium was being regarded by many, as obsolete, and proposals were being tabled for a 45,000 – 50,000 seat stadium to be built on the P.N.E. grounds. Other proposals called for expanding Empire stadium to 60,000 seats and adding a roof. In 1980, the decision was made to build a new stadium on the north shore of False Creek on industrial land that was being cleared for the site of Expo 86, and would then be part of a large development project in the area to be called, British Columbia Place. The new stadium would be home to the Lions and Whitecaps, and, it was hoped, a Major League Baseball franchise.

Lions' center, Al Wilson recalled in an interview years later, that one day he was snapping the ball and he noticed there was green paint on the field. He scratched away at the paint and noticed black asphalt, "That's how they used to repair the field at Empire Stadium", he said, "That's what we played on – it was a tough field." In 1980, use of the stadium was restricted so that the deteriorating turf would last until the Lions and Whitecaps moved into B.C. Place Stadium in 1983. After the Lions and Whitecaps moved out, Sports events were cancelled due the poor condition of the field, and fears of athletes being injured using it. The P.N.E. insurers withdrew coverage and the P.N.E. directors unanimously voted to close the stadium, but amateur sports returned in September 1983, when the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (I.C.B.C.) agreed to underwrite a policy for Sport B.C.

The future of the stadium was in doubt however, as its fate became a political football. In 1980, plans had been made to demolish the stadium once the Lions and Whitecaps had moved, and to put new buildings and parking lots in its place, but there was a public outcry due to the already limited number of playing fields in Vancouver. In 1985, a proposal was put forward to resurface

the field and track, to cut the seating from 32,700 to 11,500 and to extend the stadium lease by ten years. In 1986, P.N.E. President, Erwin Swangard asked the municipalities for funds for stadium repairs, but with budgets already tight, none was forthcoming. Pam Glass of the P.N.E. Board, who was also on the Sport B.C. Board of Directors and President of B.C. Track and Field, proposed having the stadium declared a provincial park and heritage site. A marathon was held in Stanley park to raise funds for the stadium's repair, and the Province newspaper organized a letter writing campaign to save it, but the future of the stadium was complicated by the fact that the P.N.E.'s lease of Hastings Park was due to expire in the early 90s.

In 1991, consultants put forward three proposals for the future of Hastings Park. All of them called for the majority of the park to be reverted back to green space, which involved tearing down several buildings, including Empire Stadium. In May 1992 the decision was finally made to tear the stadium down.

Empire Stadium had its date with the wrecking ball in the spring of 1993. Initially, the land was paved over and used as a parking lot, but was later turned into a playing field and the Lions and Whitecaps returned to the site in 2010 and 2011 to play their home games at Empire Field - a temporary stadium, while the original, air-supported roof at B.C. Place stadium was replaced with a new retractable roof.

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The 1955 Grey Cup Game

By James Paul Garrison

From its inception in 1909, the Grey Cup game had long been an Eastern institution; Western teams did not have the opportunity to participate until 1921, and the first Western team to win the cup did so in 1935, while the location of the annual game, remained exclusively in Eastern cities. At the Canadian Rugby Union meetings in 1934, it was decided that the Grey Cup game would be played in the west that year, however in October, the decision was reversed because the Intercollegiate and Inter-provincial Unions stated that they couldn't send their championship teams west. Western Canadians would wait more than twenty years more for the opportunity to play host to the game.

The B.C. Lions played their first season in the Western Inter-provincial Football Union in 1954, and their new facility, Empire Stadium, was the largest stadium in Canada at the time. Since 1945, the Grey Cup game had been played exclusively at Varsity Stadium in Toronto, but at the 1955 C.R.U. meetings, it was decided that the game would be played in Vancouver that year on November 26. As an expansion team, the Lions had a losing record on the field, winning only a single game in 1954, and improving to five wins in 1955, but they were a hit at the box office. The Lions missed the play-offs, but the city of Vancouver got caught up in Grey Cup fever, nonetheless!

Canadian Rugby Union Secretary, Harry McBrien arrived in Vancouver on Saturday November 12, two weeks before the game, to find that preparations for the game and festivities were well in hand. Snow was in the weather forecast, so crews at Empire Stadium spread twelve tons of straw on the field, and covered it with a tarp, to allow for a gradual thaw and to keep the turf in good shape for the game. Temporary seating, being constructed on the cinder track, in front of the stadium seating, descending for seven rows and looping around the track, was nearing completion. The temporary seating would increase the stadium's capacity from 25,557 to 31,520. The bleachers that would sit at the north end of the stadium in later years, had not yet been built, but tickets would be made available for fans to stand and watch the game from there.

The city had big plans for the Grey Cup parade, but only authorized money for a float to represent the city less than two weeks before the event. Mayor Jim Hume said the city would be remiss if as host city of the game, it failed to join the other major cities by entering a float. Up to \$3000 would be allocated for the purpose. City council also authorized the closure of two downtown streets for the festivities leading up to the game. On Thursday of that week, planners were glad that the tarp and straw had been laid out on the Empire Stadium field, when a snowstorm hit the city. The Edmonton Eskimos, who had shocked the nation in the previous year's Grey Cup game by beating the Montreal Alouettes, defeated the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in a two game Western Final, and would be representing the West in the game once again. That afternoon, the Grey Cup arrived in Vancouver on a flight from Edmonton, in a box marked, "Return to Edmonton after November 26". It was put on display at the Hudson Bay store in Vancouver. The Montreal Alouettes narrowly defeated the Toronto Argonauts in the Eastern Final, and Canadian football fans readied themselves for a Grey Cup rematch.

Preparing for the masses of people that would flow into the city during the following week, the Vancouver Police compiled a file of pickpockets known to operate in major Canadian and U.S. cities, and studied their pictures and descriptions. Vancouver's preoccupation with the game could be seen everywhere; Zellers on Granville St. held a Grey Cup sale, television sets for sale at Wosk's and Woodward's were guaranteed to be delivered before the game, Woodward's Food Floor advertised Grey Cup specials, including cakes decorated with Grey Cup motifs – "Ideal for entertaining football fans". Belmont furniture stores offered free footballs for the kids of its first 150 customers, the fashion editor of the Vancouver Sun offered suggestions for what to wear to the game and to pre and post-game parties, and its Food Editor published a casserole recipe for after the game.

On Saturday November 19, the Edmonton Eskimos arrived in Victoria. The Eskimos had left – 4F (-20C) temperatures in Edmonton and arrived to find sunshine and balmy 45F (7C) weather – the cold snap that had hit the West coast had eased. The Eskimos were met at the airport by 200 fans, wearing football shaped badges reading, "love Those Esks", with some of the children dressed like Eskimos. A few hours later, they began practicing at Royal Athletic Park in front of 400 fans. Coach, Frank "Pop" Ivy then indicated that the rest of their practices would be held in secret. The first wave of fans arrived in Vancouver from Edmonton that day, and on Sunday, decorations went up around downtown, with the city asking merchants to leave their lights on at night, and residents to put up their Christmas lights early to add to the festive atmosphere. The staff at the Hotel Vancouver and Hotel Georgia prepared to move furniture out of their lobbies. The party was about to begin.

During the two weeks that led up to the game, there were many stories in the Vancouver Sun and Province about problems in the distribution of Grey Cup tickets, and these were becoming a point of contention with fans. Tickets for the game were broken up into groups, with each team in the Western and Eastern leagues receiving a certain number of tickets to sell to fans in their city, and although no city was to receive all their seats in a particular section, an effort was being made to keep Eastern and Western fans in separate sections. The Lions were allotted just under 4200 tickets, scattered throughout the stadium, with 500 being undercover. Season ticket holders would not be able to buy tickets for the seats they had during the regular season. The Eastern teams were given the deadline of Monday November 21, to return any unsold tickets to CRU Secretary, McBrien in Vancouver, so they could be sold locally, but none were returned. The Eskimos allotment of tickets had long since been sold, with the money being collected in Edmonton, and the tickets to be picked up by their fans after arriving in Vancouver. Lions' General Manager, Phil Webb told the Province that an armed policeman would be in the Lions' office "all night and every night" until the club's allotment of tickets had been distributed. There were newspaper reports of large quantities of tickets in the possession of individuals and local retail outlets, such as one who offered a free ticket to customers who bought a new suit. The game was shaping up to be the most covered sports event in the country's history, with more personnel from newspaper, television and radio outlets than had been at the British Empire Games the year before. The stadium's press box would not accommodate them all, so to avoid taking seats away from fans, it was announced that forty reporters would watch the game from atop the stadium's roof covering the East and West stands. Even the popular Montreal Alouettes band and drum majorettes wouldn't get a break for performing before the game. The CRU announced that after their pre-game performance, the band and majorettes would have to leave

the stadium, unless they had bought tickets. The CRU rejected an offer from Montreal to build temporary bleachers for the 45-piece band and 16 majorettes.

Eastern football fans began their pilgrimage on the weekend, and on Monday morning, a train carrying fans from Toronto arrived in Winnipeg. Winnipeg's Mayor, and the Chair of the Toronto Metropolitan Council, led a parade down Main Street to City Hall. The Toronto Girl's Pipe Band marched into the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, and trading was halted for several minutes as cheerleaders turned handsprings on the trading floor, and some traders joined in on an impromptu square dance. In Vancouver, the Lions' office received many complaints from season ticket holders who weren't able to obtain Grey Cup tickets. The CRU's system of distributing tickets between the different clubs was being blamed for the shortfall. There were charges that instead of returning unsold tickets to the CRU, some Eastern teams had sold their surplus tickets at premium prices to help pay their season's debts, with tickets then falling into the hands of scalpers and retailers. Lions' President, Don MacKenzie advised fans not to buy tickets through scalpers, but instead recommended they seek out Eastern ticket owners in downtown hotel lobbies. Eskimos' Secretary Manager, Al Anderson was shocked when he arrived in Vancouver to distribute Edmonton's allotment of tickets, because Trans Canada Airlines couldn't locate the trunk containing the 3400 tickets. He was relieved six hours later, when it arrived safe and sound on another flight.

On Wednesday, a train carrying Miss Eskimo, Miss Alouette and the Alouettes' drum majorettes team arrived at the CPR station downtown. 17-year old Miss Alouette, Nancy Roland and the majorettes won over the crowd of 2000 who met the train, leaving 18-year old Barbara Beddome, Miss Eskimo behind, as they marched through the city streets to the Hotel Vancouver. The Alouettes' players and coaching staff arrived by plane later that day, and were greeted by 400 fans at the airport, including women in traditional Ukrainian dress who greeted Alouette, Buddy Korchak, himself of Ukrainian descent. The Alouettes checked in to the Dell Hotel on the Trans-Canada Highway in the Surrey's Walley area, where they took all 22 rooms. That night the Grey Cup festivities began with a fireworks display at Kitsilano Beach attended by 10,000.

Initially, the Alouettes had intended to practice at a field in Whalley, and Head Coach, Doug "Peahead" Walker had put a press ban in effect, but reporters and photographers climbed on to a roof overlooking the field, so Walker called the Police to remove them. Walker then moved practices to Queen's Park in New Westminster on Thursday, and again reporters and photographers crowded nearby rooftops. New Westminster Police appeared on the scene. The Eskimos, still in Victoria, took time off from their practices on Thursday, and went fishing at nearby Brentwood Bay, but an accident nearly took care of the Eskimos before the Alouettes could get at them, as a pier collapsed underneath them. Evidently none were seriously hurt and they caught twenty fish, which they ate for dinner. Fans continued to pour into Vancouver from across the country, and the streets downtown were jammed with people. In Chinatown, an estimated 25,000 people packed Pender Street for a Chinese Lion parade. The crowds were so thick, that firecrackers were used to open a route through the crowd. A sword dance, which was to be performed, was cancelled because of the danger to the crowd. Another 15-20,000 people crowded in front of the Hotel Vancouver and Court House to see the Alouettes band and drill team perform. Rolls of toilet paper rained down on the crowd from the windows of the Devonshire Hotel across the street. The Vancouver Police had decided not to break up the

spontaneous parties, but rather to concentrate on “controlling traffic, and curbing outbreaks of hoodlumism that might occur”. The Alouettes band and Majorettes marched down Burrard Street, leading a parade of fans, which helped ease congestion. Some of the Montreal fans gave up their tickets to the game so the band and majorettes would be able to watch after their performances on Saturday. The Vancouver Sun reported on an “underworld tip” that eastern mobsters would be arriving in Vancouver with brief cases full of counterfeit tickets. Grey Cup tickets had been in circulation in the east for nearly a month, allowing plenty of time for them to be reproduced. The following day, the Sun reported that a group of Victoria doctors had received complimentary tickets from a Montreal pharmaceutical firm, and were ready to leave for Vancouver when one of them noticed that the numbers on all the tickets were the same.

On Friday morning, the fans continued to pour in. Four railway carloads of fans arrived at the Canadian National station off Terminal Avenue and were greeted by a group of the Lions’ cheerleaders. 3500 fans were on hand at the Canadian Pacific station when a trainload of fans arrived from Calgary. Calgary’s Mayor, Don MacKay led off an impromptu square dance in the rotunda, before he and another group of Lions’ cheerleaders led a parade of more than 300 Calgary fans in white Stetsons through the streets, carrying a banner, which read, “Now even Calgary loves those Esks”. That afternoon, both football teams held their final workouts before the game. The Alouettes worked out behind locked gates at Queen’s Park for two hours, before returning to seclusion at the Dell Hotel. The Eskimos, who had traveled from Victoria to Vancouver that morning, had a light workout at Empire Stadium, which was open to the public, then went to stay at the Sylvia Hotel at English Bay. That evening, an audience of 4500 people attended the Grey Cup party at Exhibition Gardens, the highlight of which was the judging for Miss Grey Cup. There were ten contestants: one each from the five Western teams, the four Eastern teams, as well as Joan Hilker, representing the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen of the Ontario Rugby Football Union (the O.R.F.U. officially withdrew from Grey Cup contention the following year). Barbara Beddome, Miss Edmonton Eskimo was crowned Miss Grey Cup, with Joan Hardy (Miss Ottawa Rough Rider) and Emily Morgenson (Miss Calgary Stampeder) as runners-up. Marilyn Bell, famous for having been the first to swim across Lake Ontario, the year before, was on hand to present Miss Beddome with a miniature Austin convertible, a replica of the car she would receive at the game the next day. The Miss Grey Cup contestants had managed to leave the Hotel Vancouver by using a freight elevator to avoid the mobs of people in the lobby. Once again, downtown Vancouver was filled with people. Georgia Street was roped off to all traffic from Burrard to Howe, and the Alouettes’ band and Majorettes were scheduled to parade at 9:30, but with Georgia street completely crowded with people, they weren’t able to get out of their two buses, parked in front of the Hotel Vancouver – the driver couldn’t open the doors. An appeal was made with a loud speaker, and a small section finally cleared. Motorcycle Police widened the area by riding along the edges of the crowd, while other officers linked up to hold back the mob. The band and majorettes marched two blocks east, but when they turned back, the crowd burst through and mobbed them. They were finally led to safety through the mob by the Police motorcycles. The pandemonium was met with both excitement and fear by observers. During the night, a few windows were smashed, and 37 people were arrested for drunkenness and seven more for impaired driving. The festivities weren’t without their casualties, either; on Thursday night, one man went through a plate glass window on Burrard Street, nearly severing an ear, and on Friday, a 51 year old Ottawa businessman named Nicholas

Norcott, who had come to Vancouver for the game, collapsed suddenly and died in his firm's office, apparently a result of the excitement.

The city's hangover didn't dampen the spirits of the crowd that turned out for the Grey Cup parade the next morning. At 8 A.M., Calgary chuck wagons parked in front of the Hotel Vancouver and Hotel Georgia were serving up flapjacks. An estimated 130,000 people lined the parade route, which ran east along Georgia Street from Broughton, to Granville Street, north on Granville to Hastings, and east on Hastings to Jackson Street. Every man on the Vancouver police force was on duty to control the crowds. At 9:30, Stanley Park's nine o'clock gun sounded to start the parade. 250 Army cadets were stationed along the parade route, each holding a 14-foot standard, streaming with team colours and topped by a replica of the Grey Cup. The parade was led by a car built for the President of the United States, carrying dignitaries from the Vancouver Board of Trade. It was followed by the HMCS Naden band from the Esquimalt naval base on Vancouver island, the Army BC Area Band from Vancouver and the RCAF Tactical Air Command band from Edmonton. Marilyn Bell, Miss Canada 1955, Daylce Smith, and Miss Grey Cup all rode in the parade. The Lions' poor showing on the field that season was commemorated by a convertible with BC license plates bearing a banner which read, "Missed Grey Cup", and a man in a wheelchair, bandaged up and wearing a Lions uniform. Some of the floats included, BC Electric, the city of New Westminster and the city of Vancouver, but the floats that probably gained the most attention were from Toronto. They poked fun at the city's image, including one, which read, "See Toronto by subway, you'll agree it's quite a hole" and one portraying the city's cultural life, which featured a picture of a burlesque performer. The sidewalks were so crowded that people sought vantage points on ledges and rooftops. Police had to order a crowd off the roof of the Grand Union market at Abbott and Hastings when the roof began to sag. The Grey Cup festivities were a hit with fans from across the country; A Toronto Telegram editorial stated that "Vancouver has proven itself a worthy host", and The Vancouver Sun likened the festivities to V-J Day, ten years earlier. Amidst all this excitement, a classic Grey Cup championship game was about to be played...

As the parade came to an end, the heavy traffic that had snarled downtown Vancouver headed east to Empire Stadium. Outside the stadium the scalpers were dropping their prices, with the highest priced tickets, originally priced at \$7.50 selling for \$5. The crowd at the game would exceed 39,000, setting a new record for attendance at a football game in Canada. At 9:00 AM, the massive tarpaulin that had been covering the turf was lifted and although the turf had a slightly faded khaki colour to it, stadium officials found it to be in good shape. There had been rain during the week, but it held off for the big game. The ceremonial opening kick-off was performed by seventy year old, Hugh C. "Bull" Ritchie, a New Westminster resident and original member of the Lions' Booster Club, who had kicked the opening kick-off in the first Grey Cup game in 1909. He wore the same football shoes he had worn while playing for the University of Toronto Varsity team in that game 46 years earlier.

Montreal took a 1-0 lead early on with a missed field goal, but Edmonton soon stole the lead with a 12 play, 85-yard drive, engineered largely by Normie Kwong, who then scored a touchdown. Montreal soon answered using a series of running and passing plays to get to the Edmonton one-yard line, where Pat Abruzzi plunged into the end zone. Montreal's lead was extended in the last minute of the first quarter, when Jim Miller recovered a fumble on the

Edmonton 42, and Sam Etcheverry threw a long pass to Hal Patterson, who then ran the ball into the end zone. Later, Etcheverry lost possession on the Edmonton 29, and four plays later, Eskimo, Johnny Bright took a reverse hand off from Jackie Parker, broke several tackles on the right end and scored a touchdown. Montreal soon got the ball to the Edmonton 15. With second down and inches, the Edmonton defense expected a short running play, and stacked the line accordingly. Etcheverry outsmarted them, however, with a pass over Jackie Parker's head (Parker played both offense and defense) to Patterson for another touchdown. Edmonton answered with another touchdown, as Parker threw a short pass to Bob Heydenfeldt from the Montreal 15. Bob Dean kicked his third convert, and Montreal lead 19-18 at half time (Prior to the 1956 season touchdowns were worth five points, with a sixth point for the conversion).

The Eskimos dominated the second half, driving the ball downfield to the Montreal 1, where Kwong charged through the line for a touchdown. The Eskimos offence continued to dominate, and shortly afterward, marched the ball from their own 13-yard line to the Montreal 3 in 11 ground plays before Bright took the ball in to the end zone. Montreal still had some life in them, taking the ball 67 yards to the Eskimos 21 yard line, but on the next play, Jackie Parker, Edmonton's hero from the previous year's Grey Cup game intercepted Etcheverry's pass intended for Jim Miller ending any chances of an Alouette comeback. The final score was 34 – 19 for the Eskimos.

After the game, Grey Cup parties commenced around the city, in hotels, nightclubs, and in people's homes. There was a victory party for the Eskimos in a ballroom at the Hotel Vancouver, with the Grey Cup on display, and 2,000 people in attendance. Some Alouette players made appearances at that party, and several other private parties were held at the hotel. Members of the Eskimos later slipped away from the victory party for a private party with their wives and girlfriends at the Cave nightclub down the street. The Mardi gras atmosphere that had taken over downtown for almost a week, was beginning to lose steam; there were still crowds of people in the streets celebrating, but by 11:30 PM the exodus had started, as train loads of people began to head home.

Sources:

The Vancouver Sun

The Province

“Canadian Football: The Grey Cup Years” by Frank Consentino, 1969 Musson Book Company Ltd.

“Heroes of the Game: A History of the Grey Cup” by Stephen Thiele, 1997 Moulin Publishing Ltd.

Society News

On the Membership Front

You may or may not be aware the CFRS has been involved in a membership drive (see the President's Message in this issue) and a special thanks goes out to CFRS member John Valentine for his efforts to secure new members.

On the Newsletter Front

We would like to receive articles for the next issue (September 2012). Please send your articles, in an MS WORD format, to Brian Marshall at bdmstmarys@rogers.com.

Books Published

The Canadian Pro Football Encyclopedia; Every Player, Coach and Game, 1946 – 2011 by Tod Maher and Bob Gill published in April 2012. This is the 2012 updated edition, of the book originally published in 2011, to include the 2011 season, 18 new statistical categories and a new section on the history of the annual player draft.

Projects in the Hopper

a) CFRS Stats Committee; contact Brian Marshall

b) The 1954 IRFU Players by Brian Marshall

- this is a book with a "bio", including junior/intermediate teams, for 279 players that have been determined to have been associated with an IRFU team from training camp through the season
- the book will contain an index and a breakdown of the players by position and Canadian/Import for each team and the IRFU overall

c) The 1954 WIFU Players by Brian Marshall

- this is a book with a "bio", including junior/intermediate teams, for some 300+ players that have been determined to have been associated with an WIFU team from training camp through the season
- the book will contain an index and a breakdown of the players by position and Canadian/Import for each team and the WIFU overall

d) The 1954 Edmonton Eskimos by Brian Marshall

- this book will be a similar format to that of the 1954 Montreal Alouettes book