

Editors note: This article is split in two. The first half is on the early history of rugby, (Article 1).

### Article 3: CANADIAN FOOTBALL-Western Style Pt. 2

Although rugby football was first played in Canada with the formation of the Ontario and Quebec Unions, the game was not restricted to the east only. In an article that appeared in a Winnipeg daily newspaper, dated October 10, 1908, the sports described from its early beginnings in the Ancient World to its popularity in Manitoba.

#### THE GAME IN MANITOBA

At the time of the land boom in Winnipeg the first seeds of football were sown. The story of rugby in Manitoba is confined almost entirely to its career in Winnipeg. It owes its birth to a little knot of enthusiasts who in 1879 formed the Winnipeg Football Club, and for the first three or four years it was fostered by this club alone. An old player says: "We used to hold practice matches amongst ourselves, and as many of us were rusty on rules, the games were often a mixture of rugby and association football. Occasionally tours were made to play matches with teams in the country, and in these there was always a measure of uncertainty as to whether the game would be played under rugby or association football." The scene of these early football encounters was a large vacant field at the corner of Broadway and Hargrave streets. Matches were played between teams representing the footballers and cricketers, Ireland and Scotland vs. England and Canada, old Countrymen vs. Canadians. A strong drawing card in those early days was the annual meeting of England vs. the World. Results show that in 1883 the world was victorious, in '84 England turned the tables, and in '85 England was again vanquished.

#### THE PIONEERS

Amongst the pioneers of rugby we find the names of J. A. Campbell, a splendid player, who learned the game in Scotland and became afterwards the first president of the Manitoba Rugby Union: Lieut.-Col. H. G. A. Chambre, P. A. MacDonald, F. Stogart, Keith, Blanchard, H. Kyall, E. W. H. Armstrong, H. G. Wilson, W. Clark, J. Norquay, A. R. D. Paterson, B. P. Dewar.

Series of games were played between teams representing the Northwest Field Force under Capt. H. G. A. Chambre and the home guards, which were won by the latter in '85 and '86. Many of the early rugbyists were members of the Winnipeg Rowing Club, and the present holders of the championship won their first game in '85 against all-comers.

As in the older provinces, the early games in Winnipeg were governed by the English code of rules, which were retained much longer than in the east, for it was not until '96 that Canadian rules were adopted and the big scrimmage gave way to the wing game with only three men in scrimmage.

## THE BIG FIFTEEN

The year '86 found the Winnipeg club with a well-developed team under the leadership of A. R. D. Paterson. Three games were played in the fall with a team representing the Royal School of Mounted Infantry, and some very stubborn contests took place between the military boys and civilians upon old Driving Park, the present site of the university. The majority of the games were won by the school. The "Big Fifteen," as the Winnipeg team was called, owing to the fact that many of its players were over six feet in height, was composed of: Full-back, E. W. H. Armstrong, three-quarter backs, Godwin, Anderson; half-backs, Turner and J. Campbell; forwards, Stevenson, Currie, Wright, Thompson, J. Grisdale, H. W. A. Chambre, Becker, B. P. Dewer, H. Wilson, A. R. D. Paterson (captain).

## ST. JOHN'S APPEAR

The following year the Winnipeg club was captained by Hugh Tullock, a sterling forward player, who had learned the game in Edinburgh. In the absence of a regular league, scratch matches were played e.g. civilians vs. military, Scoto-Irish vs. Anglo Canadians. To this year we trace the beginnings of St. John's College club. Three of the college students namely, Tom Walton, R. G. Stevenson and C. Girdlestone, joined and played with the Winnipeg club in the early part of the fall. On a suggestion from Hugh Tullock that interest might further be aroused in the game if St. John's would organize a team, Mr. Walton started the ball rolling at St. John's. A better man would not have been found to install the rudiments of the grand old game into the minds of the collegians. He was not only a keen lover of the game, but a player of whom it may be safely said Winnipeg has seen few his equal. Upon a very uneven ground, overgrown with weeds, lying between the deanery and the present schoolhouse, Johnians first commenced chasing the pigskin under the direction of their able leader. Soon the awkward squad was whipped into shape, and a team was ready to take the field. J. W. B. Page was elected captain. Three games were played. The first was won by the "Pegs" by a score of one goal and one try to one try. In the second, the college players turned the tables upon their experienced opponents' winning by two goals and one try to a try. The deciding game was won by the "Pegs" —score one goal and one try to nil. Encouraged by their single victory, rugby was firmly planted at St. John's and has regained there ever since.

The city team was undoubtedly superior in team play, having had more experience, but the college boys were individually more brilliant. The first team representing the yellow and black was: Back-E. W. H. Armstrong; Three-quarter- C. W. Girdlestone, Thos. Walton, L. Clark; Half-back, W. R. Ross, C. McDermott; Forwards J. W. B. Page (Captain), W. R. Garrioch, C. Cunningham, J. Norquay, J. H. Wrigley, R. G. Stevenson, J. Grisdale, T. H. Pritchard (deceased) and J. G. Anderson.

## A LEAGUE FORMED

In '88 a rugby league was formed composed of three teams: Winnipeg, St. John's and Royal School of Infantry. This last mentioned team owes its organization mainly to the

efforts of Capt. McDonnell, commanding officer of the force, who was himself a splendid player and good clean sportsman, and kept the game going in spite of many defeats sustained by his team. Sergt. Timmis too, —a regular old war horse—who was still found playing the game with the Osborne club in '92, was an enthusiastic worker in the interests of this club.

This year the city club, captained by Hugh Tullock, again won the majority of games against St. John's by a score of 27-0, and 18-9, and against R.S.M.I. 29-2. St. John's defeated R.S.M.I. 29-0 and were successful in their last game with the "Pegs" by a score of 24-11. Tom Walton during this year captained the college team.

The popularity of the game was now in the ascendancy, for in the fall of '88 the game was played at Virden and Moosomin and in '89 two new clubs were organized at Plum Creek and Brandon. The R.S.M.I. journeyed to Brandon and defeated the home team by the score of three goals and seven tries to 0. The "Pegs" won their games this year against R.S.M.I. 22-2 and against St. John's 11-10 and 20-10, while the military boys received a server drubbing from the collegians, who piled up a score of 56-4.

#### NINETIETH IN FIELD

In 1890 a new team took the field. The members of the 90<sup>th</sup> Battalion, not wishing to behind their mounted fellows, organized a club and played for two seasons. St. John's in spite of their decision not to play, were found opposing the Pegs in one game in which they were beaten 18-4. The most interesting events of this season were games played for the championship of the northwest. The N.R.M.P. came down from Regina for the first time and played two games, one against the Pegs in which they were beaten 39-4, and another against R.S.M.I. in which they were successful. Towards the end of the fall the hitherto victorious 'Pegs journeyed to Moosomin and played a very hard game with the husky westerners. Moosomin won by a score of one try to nil, thus gaining the proud title of champions of the northwest, entitling them to become holders of the Hamilton Cup presented by L. A. Hamilton, president of the Winnipeg club. In '91 the 'Pegs were again victorious in the Manitoba series, while St. John's once more in the field, vanquished the 90<sup>th</sup>.

#### MANITOBA UNION FORMED

At a meeting held in the Winnipeg Hotel, Sept. 28, 1892, it was decided to change the constitution and the name of the 90<sup>th</sup> club. The new organization formed was known as the Osborne Football Club. The members of which were old 90<sup>th</sup> players and several of the Dragoons. The honorable president of the new club was C. C. Chipman, and it found an able captain in E. W. Memargen, another old country rugby player. When we remember the military lineup with J. C. G. Armytage, who captained the team during its second season. Alex N. Mouat who represented Winnipeg against northwest in 1881, and was the first secretary of the union, R. Milton, full-back, one of the strongest kickers seen on the old grounds: J. O. Hickman, and old Cambridge player: Sergt. Timmis, H. S.

Stead, A. Code, W. H. Wheatland and J. Miller, it must be conceded that the Osbornes's contribution to rugby was of the highest quality.

This year saw the formation of the Manitoba Rugby Football Union, having for its objects the promotion of rugby in Manitoba, and arranging a schedule of matches to be played for the championship of the Union. A scheme, which seems to have been peculiar to rugby in Manitoba alone, was the double series of games played in the fall and spring for the championship of the Union, which on account of the shortness of the fall, worked well in the interest of the game. Two distinct series of games were played this season, the one for the championship of Manitoba and the M. & N.W. tournament. The latter, completed in the fall evoked more than usual interest. Four teams were entered: Winnipeg, Osborne, St. John's and Moosomin. On Oct. 28, Osborne's defeated Moosomin's heavy team after a very hard game by the score of 5-2 and, on the same day Winnipeg defeated the college team. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, Winnipeg, by defeating Osborne in the final by the score of 7-2, became again holders of the Hamilton Cup. In the provincial fall series, Osborne defeated St. John's 11-5 and the 'Pegs 6-0 but, in the spring the Collegians, under Tom Norquay, defeated the 'Pegs 17-1 and Osborne 7-6 and for the first time won the championship of the Union.

#### ST. JOHN'S ON TOP

"What we have we hold", now became the college motto, for the victory perched upon the yellow and black banner for the eight successive years in provincial competition.

During this period of St. John's supremacy the Winnipeg's were their greatest rivals and while the latter frequently won in the fall, victory was secured by the college team in the final spring games. While St. John's never lacked splendid forwards with such men as J. C. Norquay, E. W. Mermagen, A. T. Cowly, Robert Flett, Dr. Baird, Alex McFarlane, Jack Grisdale, Kitchin, and J. A. Richardson (Bishop of Fredericton). It may be safely stated that the success of their team was most frequently due to the strength and speed of its back division. Amongst those players Tom Walton stood without a peer in the west, but was closely followed by the fine players in Charlie Gridlestone, E. Armstrong, W. E. Hobbs, J. D. McMurray, Tom Norquay, H. Norquay, T. P. Bates and S. G. Chambers. These were indeed giants of yore, but the college back division of '97, '98, and '99 was never beaten when "Billy" McFarlane was at fullback, "Jack" Cory, "Tammy" Hamber and T. Morton were on the line.

#### REGINA WON

In '94 the Hamilton Cup went to Regina, being won by the R.N.W.M.P. but in the fall of '95 and '96 it was regained by the 'Pegs. In the latter year the tournament took place in Winnipeg on Oct. 16 and 17 between three teams: Winnipeg, R.N.W.M.P. and St. John's when "pegs defeated St. John's 13-0 and the R.N.W.M.P. 3-0. With heavy men on the wingline (the Canadian game was now being played) led by Capt. H. A. K. Drury and at last a trio of halves in M. Irving, Benson and C. Boswell and C. G. McIntyre, one of the smartest quarters playing the game here, the 'Pegs had this year a great team.

### WINNIPEG'S STRONG TEAM

In the spring of 1901 St. John's were forced to surrender the championship to their old rivals, who held it for another season. The Winnipeg team was stronger in '01 and '02 than it had been for many seasons. In W. W. Richardson, an old Brockville player, they found a good captain to whose enthusiasm and good generalship was mainly due to capturing of both senior and intermediate honours. The 'Pegs attacking line was particularly strong for Percy, Jory, Donovan, G. Freeman, A. Osborne, W. Moss, R. G. Persse and Seagram took some beating. Out of six senior games, four were won by Winnipeg and two by St. John's.

### OARSMEN TAKE FIELD

In the fall of 1902 the oarsmen took the game, mainly through the instrumentality of "Al" Manning, an old St. John's player, who pointed out to them new fields to conquer. Manning's fresh water squad was singularly successful in landing the premier championship the first year they exchanged oars for pigskin. Some of the best rugby seen in this city was played during this season and rivalry was particularly keen between the 'Pegs and the Rowing Club. The latter won four games out of six. Amongst the new champions were such well-known players as E. B. Wood and S. Laidlaw, who had played with the "Pegs, H. Trenholen, an old McGill player, the Sprague boys who had played with St. John's, J. Boswell, C. Richards and W. Jones.

### PEGS DROP OUT

To the universal regret of rugby enthusiasts the old Winnipeg club was unrepresented when the teams lined up for action in the fall of 1903. The breach was filled, however, by the Shamrocks, a club that hitherto devoted all its attention to the association game. The destination of this club was guided by the energetic veteran footballer, "Pud" Kent, late of the Toronto Argonauts.

The Shamrocks won both senior and intermediate trophies and afterwards journeyed to Grand Forks to play the North Dakota team at their own game. This was the first instance of a Manitoba rugby team invading Yankee territory. Handicapped by a lack of knowledge of American rules, they were beaten by a score of 57-0.

The next year the 'Pegs were back in the game, but failed to win any matches. So close was the race between the Rowing Club and St. John's that an extra game was played to decide the supremacy. This the oarsmen won and have held the senior championship ever since.

Two years ago Brandon entered a first class team, but unfortunately lasted only one season.

## THIS YEARS PROSPECTS

This season finds St. John's and the Rowing Club again wrestling for senior honours while the Y.M.C.A. promises to make it interesting for their opponents in the intermediate series.

Brief and imperfect as this sketch is, it may nevertheless give some idea of what has been done for the grand old game in Manitoba. Having a past covering a period of some twenty-nine years, it surely has a greater future.

The game played, through in crude form, by ancient Greeks and Romans, played by the early Britons, played throughout the great public schools and colleges of England, played in the colleges and universities of the United States, played in the big universities of Eastern Canada, surely claims the greater attention of the youth of our western provinces. Those who have played the game, love the game and will universally acclaim "**Floreat Rugby Football**".

(Authors Note) From this point on the Manitoba Rugby Football Union challenged for the Grey Cup during the 1920's and '30's. It was the Winnipeg Rugby Football Club, later re-named the Blue Bombers that won the 1935 Grey Cup, 18-12 over the Hamilton Tigers. The 'Pegs were the first western team to win the Dominion title over the best clubs of the dominating East.

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