

THIS IS ETCHEVERRY AT WORK. THE PICTURES OPPOSITE SHOW HIS TWO HOURS IN A GAME LAST MONTH AGAINST TORONTO ARGONAUTS. ▶

Sam Etcheverry, Montreal's gambling quarterback, may score two touchdowns in two minutes or risk a game on a single forward pass. That's what makes him

The most feared football player in Canada

ON THE eve of another epidemic of Canada's favorite disease, an infection called Grey Cup fever, a remark made a year ago by Edmonton's resident football genius, Frank (Pop) Ivy, has virtually been forgotten.

The Edmonton coach had just seen his spindly-legged halfback Jackie Parker pick up a fumble with three minutes to play in the Grey Cup game in Toronto's Varsity Stadium last Nov. 27, and sprint ninety-three yards for the touchdown that wiped out a lead the Montreal Alouettes had held most of the game. It enabled the 1-to-4 underdog Eskimos to take a 26-25 lead into the final three minutes. It also filled Ivy with a sort of ecstatic apprehension in what should have been for him the year's high moment.

"I was thrilled to be ahead, but for the first time in the game I was scared," said Ivy, probing the paradox on a television program after Edmonton had hung on through the final frantic moments to win the Grey Cup. "I was afraid to death of that Etcheverry."

Sam Etcheverry is an old hand at giving fits to football coaches. Since he joined Montreal Alouettes four seasons ago he has become the most feared and versatile quarterback in the country because no one can ever be sure what he's apt to pull next. In an age of specialization in football the backfielder

BY TRENT FRAYNE

PHOTOS BY KEN BELL

who can do many jobs well has become an anachronism. But Etcheverry is the exception. He can throw a football with surpassing skill, run deceptively if not with notable speed, punt for good yardage, kick points-after-touchdown, run back opposition kicks and play a fearless tackling game defensively. In addition to all this he is a gambler, and it is this quality that has made him at once anathema to rival coaches and the toast of the volatile Alouette adherents who once booed him.

That was during Etcheverry's first year in Canada in the fall of 1952 when the Alouettes were building their present powerful team. In those days they had a porous line and the opposing linemen made life miserable for the new quarterback. So did the fans whenever he lost yards with the ball. But in the last three seasons, with the Alouettes stronger, he's been winning wild acclaim from the grandstands, as well as from the coaches.

"You can't set up a defense for him," says Lew Hayman, who was general manager of the Alouettes when Sam moved to Canada, "because nobody knows what he might pull out of the hat. By nobody, I'm including Sam."

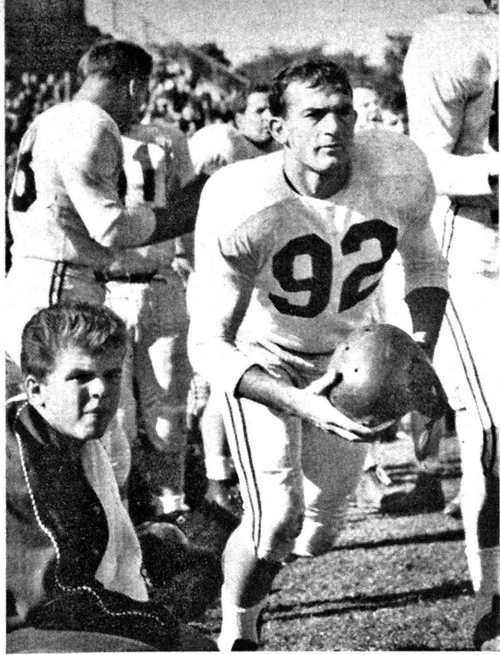
In some respects this is true. Etcheverry recalls one game against Hamilton in 1954 when he called a pass play while the ball rested on his own four-yard line. Halfway through the play he suddenly switched to another. In itself, calling a pass was a daring move in such a position because if the pass were intercepted that close to the Alouette goal line it would almost certainly result in a Hamilton touchdown. The very fact that the play would be unexpected, however, was the element that appealed to Etcheverry.

It was designed as a pass to the right end, Red O'Quinn, and as Etcheverry backtracked behind his own goal line to give O'Quinn time to shake loose from the man covering him, he was carefully watching the defensive man shadowing O'Quinn.

"Suddenly it dawned on me," he related later, "that the safety man hadn't covered our other end, Hal Patterson, who was a decoy on the play. I took a look and, sure enough, old Hal was wide open. So I pitched it to him."

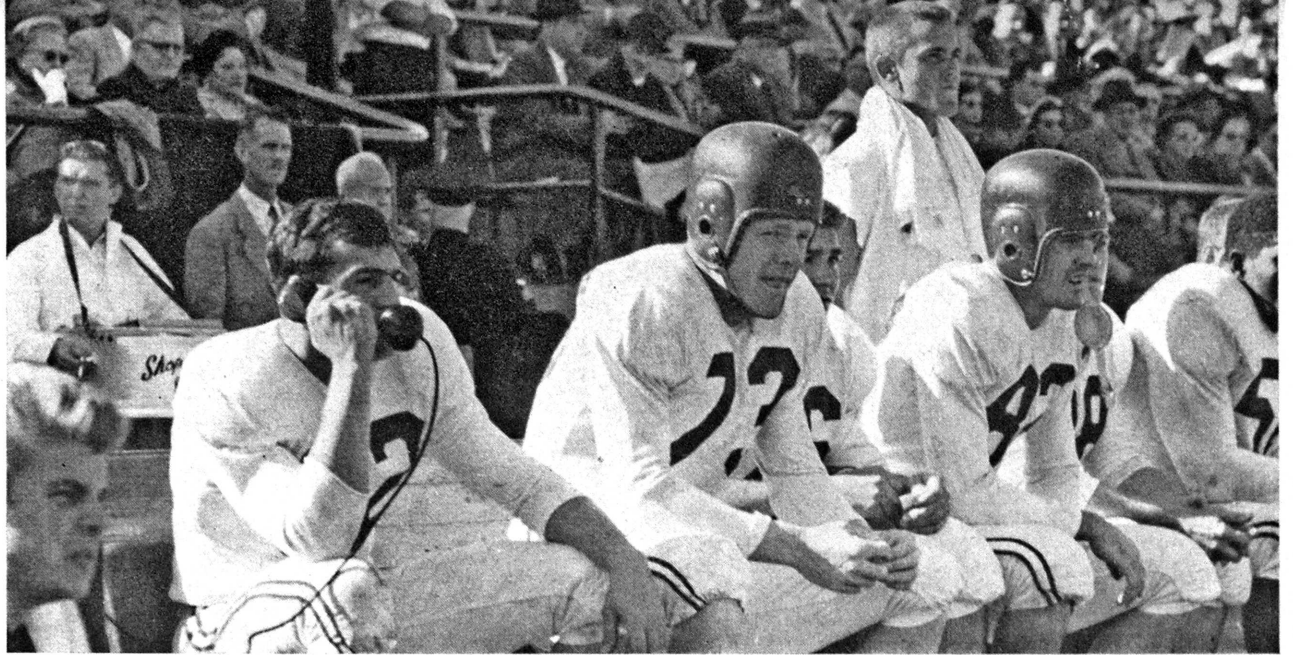
It was quite a pitch. Patterson took the ball on the forty-yard line and ran the rest of the way for the touchdown. It was, according to Big Four and Western Conference record books, the longest pass-and-run touchdown play ever completed in Canada, a hundred and six yards from the line of scrimmage.

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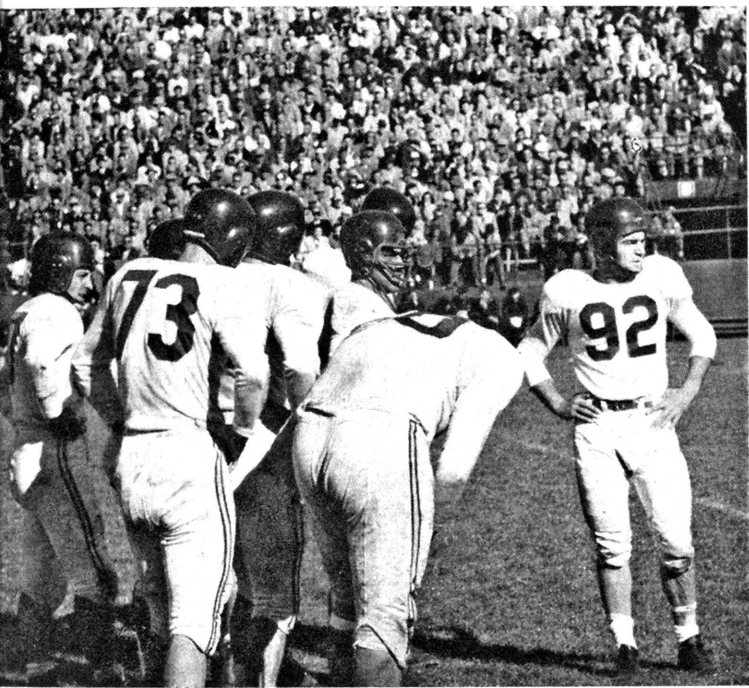
“Let’s Go To Work”

When No. 92 runs out, it usually means action. Here Sam goes to face the Argos.



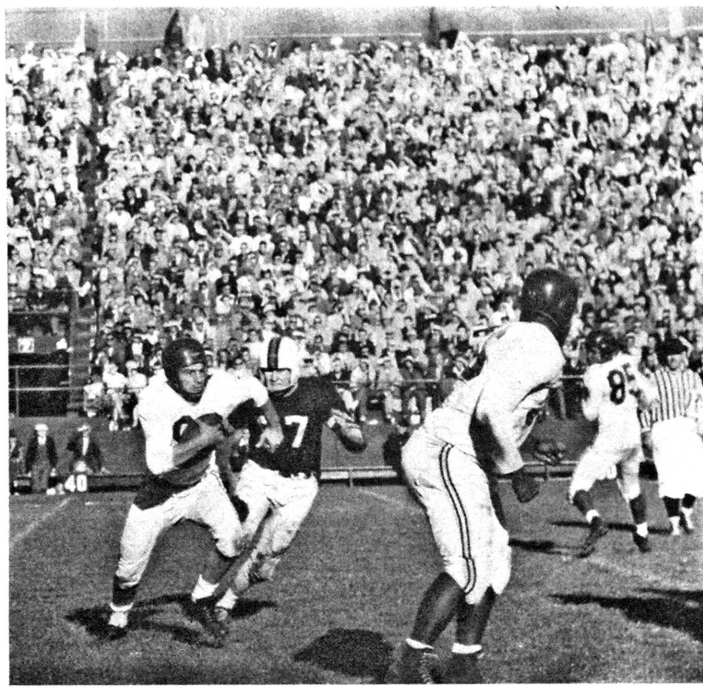
“Why Can’t We Crack the Argo Defense?”

Back on the bench while Argos have the ball, Etcheverry talks by phone to a Montreal “spotter” high in the stands. The expert’s job is to look for flaws in the enemy defense and relay the news to his team’s bench.



“What’ll We Try Next?”

Sam turns from his huddle to look over Argos’ defense. What he sees may decide a play but he often changes his mind.



“Whoa! Something Went Wrong”

Argos break through and Etcheverry, with no time to pass, has to run. He’s also a strong kicker and defensive back.



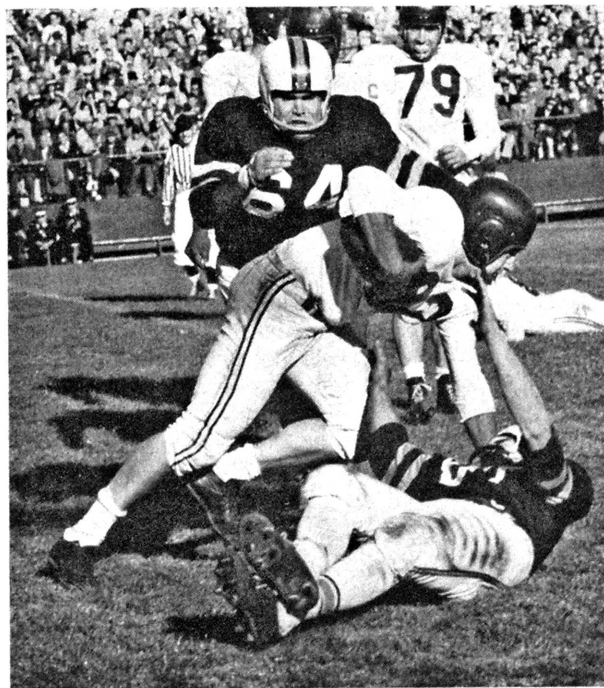
“What Hit Me?”

Winded in play he gets help from team trainer.



“Let’s Hold That Lead”

Sam has passed Alouettes to a 30-28 lead but Argos press. With coach Peahead Walker, he urges players to hang on.



“Out of My Way!”

Etcheverry bulls his way against Argo tacklers. Raised on a ranch, he’s tough, not easily hurt.



“That Was Close”

Montreal wins 30-28. Fans who used to boo him now want his autograph.

buffalo and he helped stimulate public interest by writing newspaper articles from there on his adventures. In Kansas City he met Wild Bill Hickok and engaged him to manage the show. He also hired some Sac and Fox Indians and Mexican cowboys.

When Wild Bill arrived at the Front, Blondin was forgotten. The frontiersman, with his long blond hair, broad shoulders, handsome features and his amazing record of gun victories, was quickly made a hero. He was not a show-off, but one day he walked into a bar, saw a friend asleep in a chair and

fired between his feet with a derringer. When his friend didn't bat an eye Wild Bill roared with laughter and the incident became the talk of the town.

On Aug. 28 about three thousand people gathered to see the Great Buffalo Hunt. The arena was an enclosure of about eighty acres above the Horseshoe Falls, fenced with ten-foot-high boards. In the centre two buffalo bulls grazed peacefully. In a far corner of the enclosure were four Texas steers.

Cheers went up as Wild Bill, dressed in buckskin-fringed frontier costume, rode into the arena followed by four

Mexican vaqueros and three Indians. After saluting the crowd, the little band rode out to do battle. The buffalo turned docilely and watched the cowboys riding about hallooing. Finally one stepped defiantly toward his adversaries. With his huge head and beard he seemed of enormous proportions in contrast to the prairie ponies.

For a while he charged the cowboys, as the crowd gasped. Then a vaquero lassoed one of his feet. At that moment a second Mexican and his pony were knocked over by the enraged animal and it seemed to the horrified spectators as if the buffalo was only stopped from killing both rider and pony by the lasso, held by several straining cowboys. Another lasso was thrown over his horns and the struggle ended.

The other buffalo was lassoed in the same way but broke the rope. Indians approached him on foot and on horseback, shooting blunt arrows. For a time the buffalo pursued one of the vaqueros, but the sport degenerated into a farce when it became evident that he was driven by a motley crowd of Indians, white men and boys. At last he was left in his ignominy on the grounds.

The Great Buffalo Hunt received a bad press. One correspondent wrote that it was a mere sham. "Many of the Indian chiefs had to take a buffalo by the horns to make him run. Wild Bill managed by the aid of his satellites to secure a cow, which had to be goaded into desperation before it would run. The chase after the Texan cattle was also a farce, since the Indians were evidently chasing a cow that had been roaming about for the last two years in the pastures of some peaceful agriculturist."

Even correspondents who liked the hunt got in a dig at the Front. The Cleveland Commercial Review reported that "visitors to Niagara are impressed with the idea that a swindle awaits them on every corner."

A second hunt was held two days later, but the effect was no better. Four buffalo were turned loose, but they had to be goaded to gallop. Three, it turned out, were from Colonel Barnett's museum park. Artistically and financially, the whole venture was a flop. Barnett was forced into bankruptcy and his museum sold to his old enemy, Sol Davis.

For the whole Front, the Great Buffalo Hunt was also the end. The public felt it had been cheated once too often and refused to go back. In 1888 the Ontario government expropriated the Front and created a public park. Souvenir stands, hotels, taverns, tepees—all were torn down and flowers and grass planted in their place.

In 1901 Mrs. Anna Edson Taylor went over the Falls in a barrel, and lived, and there was a slight renewed flurry of excitement, but it didn't last. For years she sat on a street in Niagara signing autographs for pennies, and eventually she died in a poorhouse. Four others—Bobby Leach in 1911, Charles Stephens in 1920, Jean Lussier in 1928 and William (Red) Hill Jr. in 1951—went over the Falls and Stephens and Hill died in the attempt. In each case the old memories of Blondin and Wild Bill were revived, but only for a day.

Today the raucous roistering Front is scarcely recognizable in quiet Queen Victoria Park with its green lawns and colorful flowers where even an Eagle Scout isn't permitted to sell an apple on Boy Scout Day. But in a nearby souvenir shop you can buy a little white stone for a dollar. It's really imported from England, but ask the salesgirl what it is and she'll tell you:

"It's congealed mist from the Falls." ★

The Most Feared Football Player in Canada

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That day, Saturday, October 16, was the most successful in Etcheverry's history in this country. He completed twenty-six passes in thirty-six attempts for an all-professional record of 586 yards gained by a passer in a single game. That represented ninety-six yards more than the Western Conference record—490 yards set by Lindy Berry of Edmonton in 1950—and thirty-two yards more than the National Professional Football League record in the United States—554 yards set by Norm Van Brocklin of the Los Angeles Rams in 1951. Sparked by Etcheverry's early surprise pass to Patterson, the Alouettes romped to a 46-11 victory.

As a gambling quarterback, he is equally capable of the unexpected when time is running out and the score is close. Just last October in a game against the Toronto Argonauts the Alouettes carried a 30-28 lead into the last three minutes, and the Alouettes had been pushed back to their own ten-yard line. Standard procedure in such circumstances is for the leading team to play it safe and to keep possession of the ball as long as possible, so that the rival team will have neither time nor the possibility of a fumble or an intercepted pass working for it.

Second-Guessing—Good-by Job

But Etcheverry, the gambler, didn't figure it that way. Realizing the Argonaut defenders would not be looking for a pass he threw one to his flying wing, Joey Pal, which carried the Alouettes to their own forty-yard line and far from the danger of their own goal line. When the Argonauts finally did get the ball they were deep in their own end and there was not time enough to muster a final threat.

The thought that a pass interception could cost his team the game at so critical a moment had occurred to Etcheverry "but it was outweighed by my conviction the Argos wouldn't be looking for it," he later explained. "If you start worrying about what *could* go wrong, you'd second-guess yourself right out of a job." And although he's been throwing daring passes from inside his own five-yard line almost since the moment he arrived in Canada, Etcheverry has been discreet enough in calling the play that only one has been intercepted in that situation in four seasons. Dick Brown of the Hamilton Tiger-Cats grabbed one and ran for a touchdown in a 1953 game.

Sam, in fact, has been doing the unpredictable in the Big Four since he arrived in Montreal in 1952 from Denver University, Colorado, an unknown with little more to recommend him than a glossy print in a football record book. The picture was used to illustrate a section on the Skyline Conference in the southwestern section of the United States which pointed out that Etcheverry had set a running-and-passing record of 1,168 yards gained. The picture, and then the statistic, caught the eye of the Montreal coach Douglas (Peahead) Walker.

"I'd never heard of him," Walker confesses, "but there was *something* about that picture. I liked his looks and his trim build and his features."

This was Walker's first year with the Alouettes, and the quarterback position was a delicate one in Montreal. George Ratterman had lasted just one

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year at that position in the 1951 season and he had turned out to be a widely publicized, highly paid, colossal bust. Walker happened to know the coach at Denver University, Johnny Baker, and he phoned to enquire about the man in the picture.

"Baker supplemented what I'd been able to pick up out of that book," Walker relates. "He said Sam was a fine competitor, clean living and not susceptible to injury."

It was a fortuitous phone call. Even in his first year Etcheverry was conceded by press-box occupants to be shoulder pads and helmet above a woeful band of Alouettes who won only two league games all year, and he was named on the Big Four's alternate all-star team. In 1953 he was the unanimous pick for first-team honors, and last year he was named as the most valuable player in the league, winning thereby the Jeff Russel Memorial Trophy, and as the outstanding football player in the country in a national poll of broadcasters and newspaper reporters, an annual award worth a thousand dollars.

No one, least of all Etcheverry, would suggest that in a game as combative as football, any player can earn all of these honors single-handed. There are many reasons for any quarterback's success, not the least of which are linemen who are big enough and aggressive enough to keep people off his back while he's winding up to throw, and ends who are deceptive enough and sure-handed enough to get the ball and hold it. He needs adept and/or bruising runners, too, so that he can attack with diversity. Etcheverry has all of these accessories, as have most quarterbacks in Canada whose teams have won more games than they've lost. The one thing that sets Etcheverry apart is that he's unpredictable, a quality that often brings inspiration to his teammates at moments when those with less imaginative quarterbacks might feel they'd picked up enough lumps for one day.

"We come from behind in a lot of our games," says Tex Coulter, the mammoth Montreal tackle, "because we don't let down when we get behind. We figure Sam will think of something. You get a kind of zest out of hearing him call a daring play, like a bunch of kids playing follow-the-leader, and you want to help him make it go."

Bruce (Bones) Coulter, no relation to Tex, who is Etcheverry's understudy, as well as a defensive halfback, has detected another quality. "I've seen him smeared and roughed up on a play three or four times when two or three big guys break through our line, but that doesn't faze Sam. If he figures the play is the right one, he'll call it again, and count on our pass defense to hold up this time. The boys respect that kind of confidence."

Sometimes, in defying standard procedure, Etcheverry raises goose bumps on his own coach, the squat, white-haired Walker. One of the oldest tenets of quarterbacking, even pre-dating the one about never passing from inside your own ten-yard line, is one that says a passer should "eat the ball"—that is, keep it and be thrown for a loss—if he's trapped by onrushing linemen and can't find a receiver. The principle here is that it's better to lose ten or fifteen yards and retain possession of the ball than throw blindly and risk the interception that would put the opposition in control. In his first year, when the Alouettes had far less material than now and Etcheverry was called upon to do just about everything except massage his own bruises, he often was trapped and thrown for huge losses. The customers hooted his seeming ineptitude and there were often



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cries of, "Bring back Ratterman!" In just such circumstances in 1953, when the Alouettes started to become a power in Canadian football, there was a game against the Ottawa Rough Riders in which Sam invented the "submarine."

He was being assailed on all sides by Ottawa players and as he ran for his life one of his pursuers was so close that Sam couldn't raise his arm to throw. Faced with a big loss as he backpedaled, the quarterback swung his arm behind his back waist-high as he was grabbed about the shoulders, and he flung the ball underhand in a long high arc downfield. Astonished Ottawa defensive backs stared in awe as the ball floated over their heads, and Joey Pal, a Montreal halfback, was galvanized into action almost in time to complete an astounding pass. He made a belated lunge for the ball and it just tipped off his fingers.

However preposterous, the incomplete pass prevented Sam from taking a large loss and it brought yelps of delight from the customers, the antithesis of the groans and abuse that had been heaped on him—and, in fact, that always emanate from grandstands anywhere when the hometown quarterback correctly elects to "eat the ball."

The combination of Etcheverry's inventiveness—he tried his submarine three or four more times in '53 and neither completed it nor had it intercepted—and the growing strength of the Alouettes got the fans off his back that season and he has become the most popular football player in Montreal history. He is rarely called anything but "Sam" and the vast majority of football fans in Montreal know who Sam is in any conversation without the necessity of the surname. Montreal broadcaster Doug Smith, in fact, has not used the name Etcheverry in a broadcast since early in 1953, even when he is giving the pre-game line-ups. Abbruzzi and Hunsinger may be the halfbacks, but the quarterback is just plain Sam.

Just recently Smith was doing one of his play-by-play broadcasts of an Alouette game when he was handed a telegram from a fan in Granby, Que. "Doug," it said, "what's Sam's last name?" It was signed "Alex." Smith has no idea who Alex is.

On the field Etcheverry moves with the faintest suggestion of a swagger from the huddle where he calls his plays to the line of scrimmage where the ball is put into play. He seems unruffled and unhurried and confident but these mannerisms are a façade, for beneath them Etcheverry is usually seething with nervous energy. He is seldom able to eat on the day of a game, or, if he does nibble at the scrambled eggs and bacon that are put before the players as they eat together in a hotel dining room, he is unable to keep the food on his stomach. Just before the game starts he becomes physically ill, and occasionally during the course of play he has paused for a moment, stooped down on one knee, and been sick at his stomach. When the team is playing at home in Montreal he refuses to touch any food and the night before a game he tosses fitfully in bed. According to his wife Nita he broods silently over a defeat, prowling restlessly around the Etcheverrys' two-bedroom apartment in the west end of Montreal, drinking an occasional bottle of beer and mentally replaying parts of the game where the tide turned against the Alouettes.

The Etcheverrys live there from July to December with their sons Steve, who is three, and Mike, eighteen months. Mrs. Etcheverry, a quiet pretty girl from Albuquerque, New Mexico, is expecting a third child. They spend the off-season in Albuquerque where

Nita's father, Harold Mulcahy, has a wholesale sporting goods business for which Sam is a salesman covering New Mexico and Colorado.

Etcheverry is a French Basque whose father, Jean Baptiste Etcheverry, was born and grew up near the village of Urepel in the French Pyrenees, where his father was a sheep rancher. Jean Baptiste emigrated to the United States when he was eighteen, and joined two older brothers who had found jobs on a sheep ranch near Carlsbad, New Mexico, where Sam was born May 20, 1930. He has two younger sisters and an older brother Jim, who is a cowboy near El Paso, Texas. Sam probably would have been a cowboy too had he not been adept at football. When the Carlsbad high school, with Etcheverry as quarterback, won the state championship in 1946 when he was sixteen, he was offered an athletic scholarship at Denver University. In his junior year he set a Skyline Conference record for running and passing of 1,107 yards gained, and in his final year he broke that mark by sixty-one yards to get his picture into the football guide through which Coach Walker was leafing in the summer of 1952.

Etcheverry says he had heard of Canadian football before receiving a letter from Walker, from friends at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, near Denver, where numerous Canadian hockey players receive athletic scholarships. It was largely on their reports that he decided to give it a whirl, plus the fact that he was offered six thousand dollars by the Alouettes. Walker recalls that the first time he saw Etcheverry on the field in Montreal he could tell he had great possibilities. "For one thing, he'd listen; he was no wise guy," says the coach. "When he made mistakes he admitted them; he didn't go around blaming a halfback for not getting a signal. He didn't alibi; he still doesn't."

No Strings on the Quarterback

Walker does not pamper Etcheverry—or any of the Alouettes, for that matter. "They all have a tremendous respect for the Old Man," says Fred Roberts, football writer for the Montreal Herald, "and they're all afraid to death of him. His word is law." The method is to Etcheverry's liking. "Sure, Walker eats me out," he says, "but he plays no favorites, and he doesn't shoot you a line."

Many coaches use their quarterbacks as puppets and, in effect, call the signals themselves from the bench. But once a game is under way Walker leaves Etcheverry on his own which Sam says has built his confidence. Walker confesses "it can be nerve-wracking" when Sam tries an unorthodox play, but adds that he sees no reason to send instructions onto the field to his quarterback, "as long as he keeps us hummin'." The coach and quarterback spend many hours together before and after practices through the week, studying the scouting reports by Walker's assistant, Jimmy Dunn, on each Saturday's opponent. On a recent Saturday while the Alouettes played in Ottawa, Dunn journeyed to Hamilton to watch the Tiger-Cats play Toronto, since Hamilton was the Alouette opponent on the following Saturday. He returned with notes and diagrams of Hamilton's most effective plays and possible defensive weaknesses. These were studied carefully, along with movies of the last Alouette-Hamilton game, by Walker, who then called Etcheverry into conference. In practice that week Walker deployed half his squad into the Hamilton formations and had Etcheverry jog the other Alouette unit through the

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plays that Walker felt would best exploit Hamilton's defensive formations.

"Football is something like the infantry," says the coach. "One general's trying to figure out in advance what the other general's up to. So it doesn't hurt us any to have an unpredictable boy at the wheel."

Sam was never so unpredictable, however, as on the night of last Jan. 7, long after the Grey Cup game, when he sheepishly confirmed from his home in New Mexico that he had signed two contracts to play football in 1955, one with the Chicago Cardinals of the National Football League, and one with the Alouettes.

There are conflicting reports as to how this remarkable situation arose. Vic Obeck, the Alouette general manager, claims that he and Etcheverry shook hands in agreement on a 1955 salary figure before Sam left for his home last December. "We were in perfect agreement," says Obeck. "We didn't sign because I wanted Walker to be present when we did and he'd gone home."

Sam doesn't remember it this way. He says he was not satisfied with the raise he'd been offered over his 1954 salary of about eight thousand dollars. He says that four U. S. National Football League teams had contacted him last fall, one of them the Chicago Cardinals. After he got home he was constantly prodded by the Cardinal coach, Joe Stydahar.

"It was a brain-washing," says Obeck. "They telephoned him every hour on the hour."

Finally Etcheverry agreed to fly to Chicago at the Cardinals' expense to talk to team officials. They reportedly offered him a two-thousand-dollar bonus for signing, a fifteen-thousand salary for one year, and agreed to give him a five-thousand advance if he'd sign.

"It wasn't that much," Sam says now, "but it was a heap more than I was getting. I signed."

He immediately telephoned Obeck, he says, to tell him he'd decided to play for Chicago. Frantically Obeck then set up a meeting in New York among the Alouette owner, Ted Workman, Etcheverry, Coach Walker and himself.

"The boy realized he'd made a mistake," says Obeck. "He signed with us." He declines to reveal the salary, as does Etcheverry, but it's known to be for two years and is believed to call for twenty-two thousand dollars for the two seasons.

When word reached the Cardinals that Etcheverry had signed with Montreal, the team's owner Walter Wolfner threatened to sue the Alouettes for two hundred thousand dollars for breach of contract. When contacted by telephone recently, Wolfner claimed the Alouettes had "threatened Etcheverry with a dire number of suits and forced him to sign." He had not yet pressed his breach-of-contract suit against the Alouettes "but I haven't dropped it, either." He claimed that the Cardinals had offered Etcheverry a fifteen-thousand-dollar contract and that they'd given him a five-thousand advance "which the player returned."

There seems to be little question why Etcheverry returned to the Alouettes: in two words it was Peahead Walker. When he sat down to talk to the quarterback in New York, it was a case of Etcheverry listening to a man he had learned to trust. "He pointed out that I'd have a longer career in Canada," Sam says. "He told me a few other things. The coach doesn't shoot a line."

For the white-haired Walker it was just another turbulent chapter in his life with unpredictable Sam. "A foot-

ball player," he drawled, "is a lot like a woman: a little flattery turns his head. That's what happened to Sam with the Cardinals."

With Sam back at the controls this year, the Alouettes picked up just about where they left off last, the best-balanced club in the east, the most colorful to watch and, all fumbles and injuries being equal, the team most likely to be in Vancouver toward the end of this month to face the Western Conference champion in the Grey Cup game. If they are, the largest crowd in Grey Cup history, upwards of thirty thousand in Vancouver's Empire Stadium, will get a full measure of entertainment from the country's most versatile quarterback. Part of the entertainment this time will not be located in the newspapers, Sam promises, as it was last year under his signature in the Toronto Telegram. On that occasion an indiscreet observation made to the newspaper's Bob Frewin, who ghosted a daily series for him, helped contribute to Edmonton's upset victory.

On the play in which Edmonton's Jackie Parker ran ninety-three yards with an Alouette fumble to turn the tide in the Eskimo's favor, there was only one man on the field who had a chance to head off Parker after he picked up the loose ball. That man was Etcheverry, who was in position to angle across the field and cut off Parker's course straight down the sidelines.

"I didn't know whether to try to outrun him or to slow down and try to fake him," Parker said later. "Then I remembered a story I'd seen in the paper which said he wasn't a very fast runner. I figured the piece had to be authoritative because it was written by a fellow named Sam Etcheverry. So I just put my head down and ran." ★

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