

This is the Edmonton split-T as artist John Little sees it in action against Montreal Alouettes. Quarterback Jackie Parker (left centre) has taken the ball from centre and slides to his right . . . led by blockers (in their order of proximity to Parker) Normie Kwong, Johnny Bright and Rollie Miles. Montreal's Doug McNichol (74) is about to be blocked by Earl Lindley. Montreal linemen Tex Coulter (60) and Tom Hugo (48) are also being impeded, clearing a path for Parker, who can continue to run with the ball or pass it to an Edmonton player racing downfield.

Will they ever beat the Eskimos?

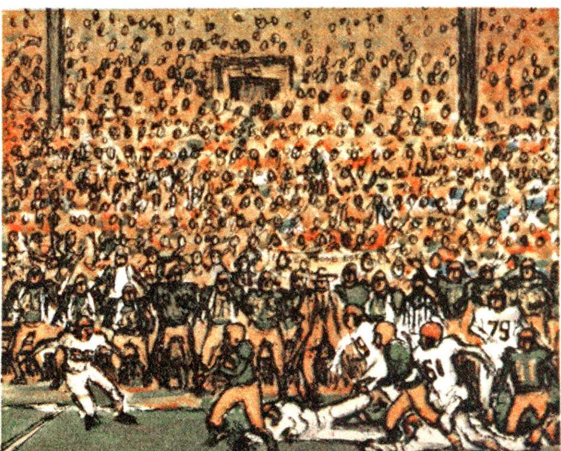
With their baffling split-T the Eskimos of Edmonton have won the national title twice in a row. The task they pose is not to stop them but to find the ball



Deception: In Vancouver's Empire Stadium Alouettes bring down one Eskimo while another runs with ball.

What makes the split-T hard to stop

Speed: Past the Montreal line, Normie Kwong quickly shifts away from a tackler and races down the field.



By Trent Frayne ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN LITTLE

Freddie Black, a Toronto Argonaut lineman chock-full of muscles, once related that the most unusual day he'd ever spent on the football field was in an exhibition game against the Edmonton Eskimos in the early fall of 1955.

"I made nineteen tackles," Black recalled with mixed pride and dismay, "but not once did I get the guy with the ball."

Black's experience was one of the end products of a new device by which the Eskimos have become the most successful football team in the country and the only western club ever to win the Grey Cup two years in a row. They've developed an attack so deceptive that the enemy often can't see the ball, much less get hold of it. In the words of Al Sherman, the oft-distressed young coach of the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, "they give you fits with their ball control."

"The more they have it, the less you get it," expands Sherman, who has been trying for two years to find ways of beating the precise Edmontonians in the Western Conference. "It comes down to the corny old saying: you can't score if you don't have the ball."

The secret behind these exasperating habits, besides good coaching and good football players, is a formation called the split-T, held by many professional coaches to be too demanding of the quarterback to be practicable, and by some team managers to be too dull and methodical to be good business at the box office. The Eskimos, impervious to its detractors, have used it to rip

up eastern Canada's lease on the national championship, and undertake a reign of terror of their own.

From 1942 through 1953 the western champion had won the annual east-west final only once. Even in 1954 when a macaroni-legged halfback named Jackie Parker picked up a fumble and steamed ninety-six yards with the touchdown that meant a 26-25 edge for Edmonton over the Montreal Alouettes, there were eastern pundits who felt the result merely proved that there was a law of averages.

But last year, before the greatest throng ever to see a football game in Canada, if rarely the football—39,417 in Vancouver's Empire Stadium—the Eskimos illustrated that they have now perfected their violent version of the shell game. This time the victory was as convincing as a punch in the nose, and once again Edmonton's victims were the Alouettes, by far the most accomplished team in the east last season, and by all odds the most confused by the time the Eskimos had finished proving that the handoff is quicker than the eye. Long before their 34-19 victory had been consummated, it was apparent that the trick of playing with an invisible football was the best western weapon since the invention of Fritz Hanson, a yellow-haired will-o'-the-wisp who inspired the west's first victory exactly twenty years before the Eskimo avalanche.

The instrument by which all of this has been achieved, the split-T—or, for the benefit of pur-



ists, a variation of the split-T—is only one of the dozens of football systems and modified systems that fill the heads of football coaches. The split-T differs from most in the manner in which the linemen align themselves before the ball is snapped, and in the movements of the quarterback as the play unfolds. When the team comes out of a huddle and prepares to run a play, the linemen do not crouch shoulder to shoulder, as in most systems, but spread, or split, anywhere from one to four feet apart. The defense must spread, too, in order to hold off the ensuing charge. This, obviously, opens holes through which halfbacks can dive and fullbacks can charge and the quarterback can occasionally sneak. The advantage of this system is that linemen need only sustain the holes, not open them. Often a smaller man can do this job against a behemoth opposite him.

“I haven’t got the ball!”

In last year’s Grey Cup game, for example, a comparative shrimp like 215-pound Dale Meinert of Edmonton had no trouble containing the 260-pound leader of the Alouette line, Tex Coulter; he didn’t have to knock Coulter down to create a hole for his backs to hammer through, he needed only to hold him off long enough for the backs to squirt past, since the hole was already there.

In this system, if the defense refuses to open up when the offensive linemen split, then wide-

running plays have increased chances of success.

Although the split-T probably derived its name from the split line, the most important difference between it and other formations is the path of the quarterback. Once he has taken the ball from the centre a split-T quarterback drifts up and down the line, parallel to and just behind his line of scrimmage. He can hand the ball off to backs charging past him into the line, or flip it to a back running wide, or burst through the line with it himself, or pass it, and of course on every play he goes through the motions of doing all four of these things. He can do them either by moving to his left down the line of scrimmage, or to his right, while making his fakes.

A quarterback must be a sleight-of-hand genius to fool the defense into thinking he’s doing one thing with the ball when actually he’s doing another, and the backs must be equally deceptive in making the defense think *they* have accepted the ball and are running with it. Once, in the 1954 Grey Cup game, Normie Kwong, the Edmonton fullback, dived through the line after brushing past Edmonton’s quarterback, Bernie Faloney, and apparently taking a handoff from him. Kwong was grabbed by Montreal’s Coulter and an official standing over them was just about to blow his whistle to indicate the play was over.

“Don’t blow it! Don’t blow it!” shrieked Kwong at the official. “I haven’t got the ball!”

Across the field, quarterback Faloney was flip-

ping the ball to Jackie Parker, running wide, and Parker was starting to tightrope down the sideline.

In 1955 the Edmonton offense grew even more deceptive when the tall and solemn Eskimo coach, Frank Ivy, shifted Parker from halfback to quarterback. Parker is a flaxen-haired, pigeon-toed graduate of Mississippi State, a split-T school at which he illustrated his dedication to football in a manner never demonstrated before or since.

Parker was unable to get an athletic scholarship at any of the colleges in the Southeastern Conference because he was married; so, with an opportunity to get into football at Mississippi State, he and his wife Peggy Jo decided to get a divorce. They’d been married when Parker was sixteen, and at the time of the divorce they were childless. A year later he became the country’s leading scorer and married the girl all over again. Now, at the ripe old age of twenty-four, the amiable Parker has had one wife, two marriages, a divorce and seven years of matrimony during the last eight years. People who have opposed him in football feel he is unique *on* the gridiron, as well.

The man indirectly responsible for the trouble that Jackie and the split-T have been heaping on rivals is Frank Filchock. Filchock, who has been in Canadian football for ten years, is a peripatetic American who landed in Edmonton in 1951 after sojourns in **continued on page 38**

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Will they ever beat the Eskimos?

Continued from page 15

Looking for a coach, Edmonton found the split-T

Hamilton and Montreal. Currently, he is coach of the Saskatchewan Roughriders in Regina.

Filchock became coach of the Eskimos in 1952 after a season as assistant coach and part-time quarterback. When the club's executive secretary and manager, A. J. (Al) Anderson, looked over the roster of the 1952 club he discovered that Filchock and an ancient Canadian, Bill Stukus, were the only quarterbacks. Anderson decided that two such veterans were poor quarterback insurance, so, on impulse, he picked up the telephone and asked the operator to find him a man named Charles (Bud) Wilkinson, the coach of the Oklahoma University Sooners. This was the most significant phone call Anderson had ever made in football, although he didn't know it at the time. He had plucked Wilkinson's name from somewhere back of his hair-line because he'd read that Wilkinson had been named coach-of-the-year in U. S. intercollegiate football. All Anderson hoped was that he was as obliging as he was successful.

It turned out that he was. Wilkinson gave Anderson the name of a quarterback who'd played for him at Oklahoma, Claude Arnold. When Arnold arrived in Edmonton he brought with him an end named Frankie Anderson, who has since become one of Canada's top linemen.

"They told us about the split-T," which they'd played at Oklahoma, but we didn't pay much attention at first," manager Al Anderson recalls. "But then we had that fuss with Filchock, and we became all ears."

The "fuss with Filchock" resulted in his being dropped as Edmonton coach. Newspapers have hinted that after the

Eskimos won the Western Conference championship in 1952 and were preparing to travel to Toronto to meet the Argonauts for the Grey Cup—a game they were to lose—Filchock threatened not to make the trip unless or until the Eskimos hired him for the following season at a substantial increase in salary. There were other published reports that he demanded a bonus for having won the western title. Anderson declines to reveal the exact nature of the "fuss" but when confronted by these reports he says "it was something like that."

At any rate the Eskimos decided, even before they lost the Grey Cup game to the Argonauts by 21-11, that they wanted a new coach. Anderson set off for Oklahoma for a visit with Bud Wilkinson. There he was converted irrevocably to the split-T system. He learned that Wilkinson was a disciple of Don Faurot, head coach at the University of Missouri, who had conceived the idea of the split-T in 1941, and that it had been adopted by a small though successful group of college coaches, notably Wilkinson at Oklahoma and Jim Tatum at Maryland. He learned that the system's execution involved endless hours of practice to perfect a required split-second timing, and that this extended to linemen as well as backs. He learned that Wilkinson had completed a coup in the state of Oklahoma by getting the majority of the high-school coaches to switch to split-T, thus ensuring Oklahoma of a supply of youngsters grounded in the system's fundamentals.

Anderson learned that none of the teams in the National Professional Football League use a split-T offense, probably because so few of their recruits

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MACLEAN'S

graduate from colleges that use it, and also because it exacts a physical toll on quarterbacks, particularly in the rough-and-tumble NFL. This meant that if Edmonton shifted to the split-T it would not have to vie financially with NFL teams for players, at least not to the extent that Canadian teams using more conventional offenses do.

Anderson came away with one more thing, a coach. On Wilkinson's recommendation he interviewed Darryl Royal, a former Wilkinson quarterback at Oklahoma, who left his assistant's job at Mississippi State to become the twenty-eight-year-old father of the split-T in Canada.

The Eskimos worked hard on retooling in 1953, putting in the new system, and their ground attack became the talk of the Western Conference. They lost only four league games out of sixteen, and Winnipeg barely nosed them out in the third game of the best-of-three western final on a last-minute touchdown. It was obvious that Darryl Royal had the team of tomorrow.

But then Royal was offered the head coaching job at Mississippi State, a job he cherished because of his former association with the school. He withheld his decision until Manager Anderson had made another trip to Oklahoma for another visit with Bud Wilkinson. Wilkinson, tickled by the manner in which the split-T had succeeded in Canada, was willing to release his own assistant, Frank (Pop) Ivy, to carry the gospel north, and even sent his line coach, Gomer Jones, to Edmonton with Ivy for pre-season training. Royal stayed around for that summer session, too, and was instrumental in getting Jackie Parker to move north when he came out of college.

Thus a new dynasty in Canadian football was built, and the question that arises manifestly is why haven't other Canadian teams leaped onto the split-T bandwagon in line with the maxim, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em"?

In a sense, some of them have. In the west the phrase, ball control, has become a by-word. Western Conference teams that once were pass-happy while the likes of Indian Jack Jacobs, Glenn Dobbs, Frankie Albert and Keith Spaith turned the game into basketball-in-cleats have switched their attacks to the slower, more methodical ground game designed to let them keep control of the ball for longer periods.

In the east, the Ottawa Rough Riders imported quarterback Jack Scarbath from the successful split-T school, University of Maryland, last season, and the Hamilton Tiger-Cats emphasized a variation known as the Belly Series, so-called because of the manner in which the quarterback fakes the ball into his halfbacks' stomachs as they fly past. Even three years ago, when things were going badly for Coach Frank Clair of the Argonauts, Clair announced that he was going to incorporate the split-T into his offense, as though the words themselves were some sort of panacea. Clair said he would employ Royal Copeland in the key quarterback position. Copeland, long an Argonaut offensive star, had been used chiefly as a defensive halfback by Clair that year, and it is recalled that press-box pundits looked forward eagerly to the unveiling of the mysterious split-T, word of which had seeped east from Edmonton.

The monumental moment arrived in a game in Montreal in which the Argos, as usual, were taking their lumps. Copeland came bounding off the bench and ran into the huddle. They came out of it and lined up with Copeland in the unaccustomed quarterback position. Then

FROM THE TYPEWRITER OF MARY WALPOLE

Columnist of the Toronto Globe & Mail

... The best holidays are the impulse ones. Suddenly you are weary of the day by day routine and it doesn't help to have most of your friends packing bags to places with faraway and romantic names. Then there comes that moment when Father is off on a business trip to Europe and the doctor tells you that the

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the ball was snapped and Copeland was lying on the ground with approximately two tons of Alouettes joyously athwart him. They bravely tried it once more, with precisely the same result, and Copeland staggered from the fray.

"Great whooping cranes!" cried a press-box pundit. "Is that the split-T?"

Well, no, it wasn't, however it may have looked on the Argonaut blackboard. This is another key to the Edmonton success: in the words of Bill Earley, formerly of the Notre Dame coaching staff and now general manager of the Argonauts, "you've got to have the horses," meaning that personnel is also important.

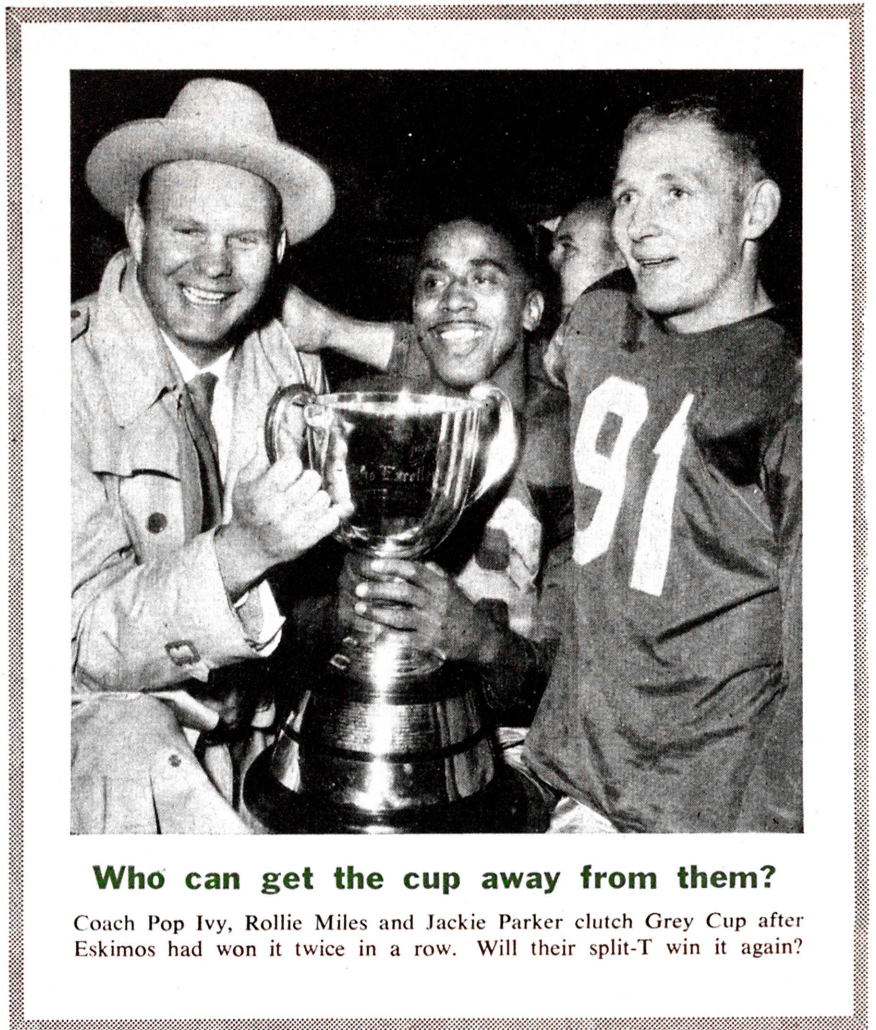
The Eskimos do have the horses. There is a backfield described by almost all sports writers after last year's Grey Cup game as the best ever assembled in Canada. Aside from the practically incomparable Parker, it includes Normie Kwong, a pulverizing runner born in Calgary, who is the only Chinese in professional football; Johnny Bright, a burly Negro from Drake University who gained international attention four years ago when his jaw was shattered by a deliberate punch from an opponent anxious to get him out of the game; Earl Lindley, a six-foot, two-hundred-pounder from Utah who throws left-handed passes because, as a boy, polio crippled his right hand; and Rollie Miles, a lithe swift Negro from Washington, D.C., who came to Canada as a baseball player and, for the past six years, has been one of the country's most consistent breakaway runners. These five, with their tremendously divergent backgrounds, have the *esprit de corps* of college undergrads.

Last year, for example, as the Eskies came up to their final game of the western schedule, Kwong was trailing Winnipeg's Gerry James as the player who had gained the most yards for the season, called rushing. Ordinarily, Kwong carries the ball ten or twelve times a game, but in this one Parker, the quarterback, called Kwong's signal thirty times to give him a greater opportunity to overhaul James. Kwong, who is built like a fire hydrant, ran with the ball until his tongue hung out, and his violent playmates greeted his every return to the huddle with a thump on the buttocks, the game's quaint mode of approbation. He won the league's rushing honors with fifty yards to spare over James.

"How could I miss?" he enquired later, "with a bunch of guys like that. They were happier about it than I was."

Normie's square name is Lim Kwong Yew. His father took the surname Kwong when he emigrated from China in the early Twenties because, as Normie recalls it, "the place was crawling with Lims; it was as bad as Smith." Kwong was born in Calgary and played with the Western Conference's Stampeders. In 1951, in one of the weirdest football trades ever negotiated, the Stamps sent him to Edmonton for a back named Reg Clarkson, who has never been heard from since. Kwong, who is called the China Clipper, got two hundred and fifty dollars for his first season of football back in 1948 when the Stampeders won the Grey Cup, and today he reportedly makes twelve thousand a season.

Kwong's teammate Johnny Bright, a handsome heavy-browed giant, was brought to Canada by Calgary four seasons ago after a spectacular college career at Drake University. He was injured a couple of times and the Stampeders, as in the case of Kwong, let him get away to the Eskimos where he was a defensive star when the Eskies won the Grey Cup in 1954. Then last season Coach Frank Ivy, endeavoring to take advantage of the



Who can get the cup away from them?

Coach Pop Ivy, Rollie Miles and Jackie Parker clutch Grey Cup after Eskimos had won it twice in a row. Will their split-T win it again?

fact that Canadian rules permit five backfielders as opposed to four in American football, put Bright at fullback, along with Kwong. This gave the Eskies two pile drivers at the position and pointed up the weakness of many American coaches of Canadian teams, who have been unable to adapt that fifth backfielder to their coaching systems. Most of them, in the east at any rate, simply send the fifth man wide to get him out of the way, and then go ahead and play with the familiar four-man backfield.

At that, Bright barely got the second fullback job when Coach Ivy set down his new offense last season.

"I was undecided between him and Earl Lindley," says Ivy. "It's my opinion that Lindley is the best fullback playing halfback in the game."

Jack Wells, a veteran western football broadcaster from Winnipeg, calls Lindley the most underrated player in the Western Conference.

"He can do everything," says Wells. "It's just that men like Kwong and Parker and Miles are more spectacular."

Miles, the oldest Eskimo backfielder in point of service, lives the year round in Edmonton with his wife Marianne and their five children. He's a member of the Lions club, chairman of the recreation committee of the Edmonton suburb of Sherbrooke, where he lives, and in his spare time he coaches a high-school football team in Edmonton. Six years ago he went to Regina to play baseball and then accompanied the Regina team to Edmonton for a ball game. A sports writer happened to remark to the ball club's manager that Miles looked good.

"Yeah, he looks pretty good," agreed the manager, "but you ought to see him play football."

The sports writer relayed this intelligence to Annis Stukus, the Edmonton football coach in 1950, and Stukus quickly contacted Miles and signed him to play.

Stukus had been in Edmonton a year

then, and he is generally credited with being the man who revived football interest there. The Eskimos had dipped a speculative toe into the Western Conference in 1938 and 1939 under an American coach named Bob Fritz, but they'd lost money and had quickly withdrawn. In 1949 they tried again, and hired Stukus, the garrulous enthusiast from Toronto who had been an outstanding player for the Argonauts. Stukus spent three years in Edmonton and never stopped talking football for a minute of it.

Stukus gave them good football, too, and the interest he pricked in northern Alberta has swelled to fantastic proportions. From its meagre beginning, the club had reached the point where by last April it had already sold 13,500 season tickets to this fall's schedule, which means that come rain, wind or snow the Eskies have already sold that many seats to every one of their home games. The budget has swelled accordingly and by 1954 the gross income had reached \$520,957, and expenditures were \$500,876, including \$260,000 for salaries.

Such statistics tend to explode the theory that split-T football is dull football, an opinion held by, among others, Bill Earley, the Argonaut general manager.

"I think this is one reason none of the NFL teams use it," says Earley. "It's extremely repetitious but I imagine, since the Eskimos are winning with it, that this is all that matters to the Edmonton fans."

Even Ken Montgomery, an Eskimo director, has moments of doubt about the split-T's long-range fan appeal. "It takes an Einstein with a slide rule in the stands to figure out what they're doing out there," says Montgomery, currently the president of the CRU. "This split-T system Ivy has is too efficient. The game starts, points are scored, and nobody can figure out why. The fans want more spectacular football, aerial stuff. We say this to Ivy and he says, 'If I don't win you'll fire me.'"

Around Edmonton, Ivy is no less popular than Stukus, the man who revived football interest there, although he is of a personality that is the direct antithesis of Stukus'. Ivy wouldn't use the daily Stukus wordage output in an entire season but in his solemn way he has the confidence and loyalty of his players. In his unprecedented success of winning two Grey Cups for the west in succession, he has gained the admiration of the customers.

If there is a single word to describe Ivy's methods the word is probably painstaking. He leaves no detail to chance, and doesn't burden his players with an exhaustive repertoire of plays.

"It's not so much a question of what plays you run," he says, "as it is how well you execute them." He works his players through his plays in endless repetition to make the execution as nearly perfect as twelve co-ordinated human units can make it.

Even before last year's Grey Cup final Ivy knew he would lose at least six players before the 1956 season rolled around. In most cases the losses were attributable to the U. S. army draft; this is one penalty the Eskimos pay for recruiting young American college graduates. Ivy was thinking of replacements the moment the Grey Cup game was won. He set off for Miami in December where he saw the North-South bowl game and the Orange Bowl game. In the latter, he watched the two greatest exponents of the split-T in American college football, Oklahoma and Maryland. He was in Montgomery, Alabama, for the Blue-Gray game, and in Mobile, Alabama, for the Senior Bowl game. His assistant coach, Ray Prochaska, scouted the East-West game at San Francisco, and both of them made calls on coaching acquaintances all over the west and south.

"We asked them for information about the outstanding players in their sections," Ivy explains. "By mid-January we had reduced our list of prospects to around forty or fifty men. Then it was just a matter of trying to sign some of them."

But Ivy does not regard these scouting junkets as the most important part of his preparation for the forthcoming season.

"The difference between winning and losing is how well our Canadian players perform," he says. "They're the backbone of any squad in Canadian football."

To help him produce Canadians, Ivy now has coaches in Edmonton using the split-T offense in high schools, and he holds seminars to brief them in the system's intricacies. He rarely misses a high-school game in Edmonton, where he now lives the year round with his wife and their two children, Lee Frank who is thirteen, and Susan, who is nine. Ivy has contacts in eastern Canada, too, keeping him informed on the abilities of players in the four-team intercollegiate league. One of the best of his recent eastern acquisitions is quarterback Don Getty of the University of Western Ontario, who went to work in Edmonton at a job supplied by the Eskimos, and was tutored by Parker as a split-T quarterback last season.

Can Ivy win another Grey Cup? He grins at the question. "Grey Cup?" he asks. "What about the Western Conference? The calibre of football here in the west is progressing so rapidly that our 1956 team will have to improve in the same ratio as our 1955 team did over our 1954 team."

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