

Szafranski has big year; wants a Vanier Cup

by Jay O'Neill

If a genie granted Daryl Szafranski one wish, he would have no problem in choosing it.

"I want to go to the Vanier Cup. I just want a ring on my finger. That's all I want," said Szafranski.

This wish did not come true this year because the University of Alberta Golden Bear football team failed to make the playoffs after a promising 4-2 start. "I've never been so heartbroken in my life. The last week I've been wondering around with my head cut-off," said Szafranski. "I couldn't believe the fact we didn't do it."

He was not only disappointed for

himself for not making the playoffs, but also for the Bear defence. "I've known a lot of those guys for four years now. They played their hearts out. (There isn't) a group of guys any more deserving than those guys are."

Although the Bears didn't make the playoffs, Szafranski enjoyed his best year ever. The Bear wide receiver had 22 receptions for 435 yards and two touchdowns. He attributes his success to a variety of reasons.

The first is the time he spends during the off season working out with quarterbacks Jeff Steinberg and Aaron Smith. They work on

keeping in physical shape and also on their passing and receiving skills.

Szafranski feels the passing practice makes a big difference in their on field performance because a chemistry develops between the quarterback and the receiver. The players then begin to know what the other person is thinking. "I know Jeff and Aaron to a T," Szafranski said. "It makes things so much easier and it transpires out on the field."

Another facet which makes Szafranski an excellent receiver is he used to play defensive back. He made the switch after coach Jim

Donlevy asked him to play receiver after his first year with the Bears. "I've always had dreams of playing wide receiver."

This defensive experience makes it easier for him to run his pass patterns because he can recognize defensive coverages and then make adjustments to find the open spaces.

The third reason Szafranski had such a great year was the coaching of Gino Fracas. Fracas brought a new offensive scheme of thinking to the University of Alberta. In the past, the Bears were basically a run-oriented offence.

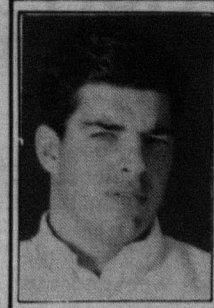
Under Fracas' system, they became more of a balanced attack between the run and the pass. With more pass plays in the offence, Szafranski got to see the ball thrown his way a lot more than he has in the past.

He said Fracas spent a considerable amount of time teaching the quarterbacks and receivers how to run their patterns and read defences efficiently. Szafranski felt the biggest contribution Fracas made was he installed a feeling of confidence in the offence.

The fourth year veteran Szafranski will come back next year for his last as a collegiate football player. When he hangs up his cleats for the last time, the thing he will miss most will be the team unity. "I'll definitely miss the guys and the friendships you make," Szafranski said.

Szafranski would like to see football be a part of his future when he's graduated from Commerce. He would like to coach football at the high school level or he would like to get a job in the marketing field. He would like to market the CFL to bring fans back into the stadiums. Szafranski said this could be accomplished by creating a family atmosphere at the game so parents could bring their kids and enjoy it.

Darryl Szafranski will leave football at the U of A next year, but hopefully he will achieve his goal of a trip to the Vanier Cup. When he achieves that he can then pursue a professional life in some aspect of the football world.



Bob Stauffer

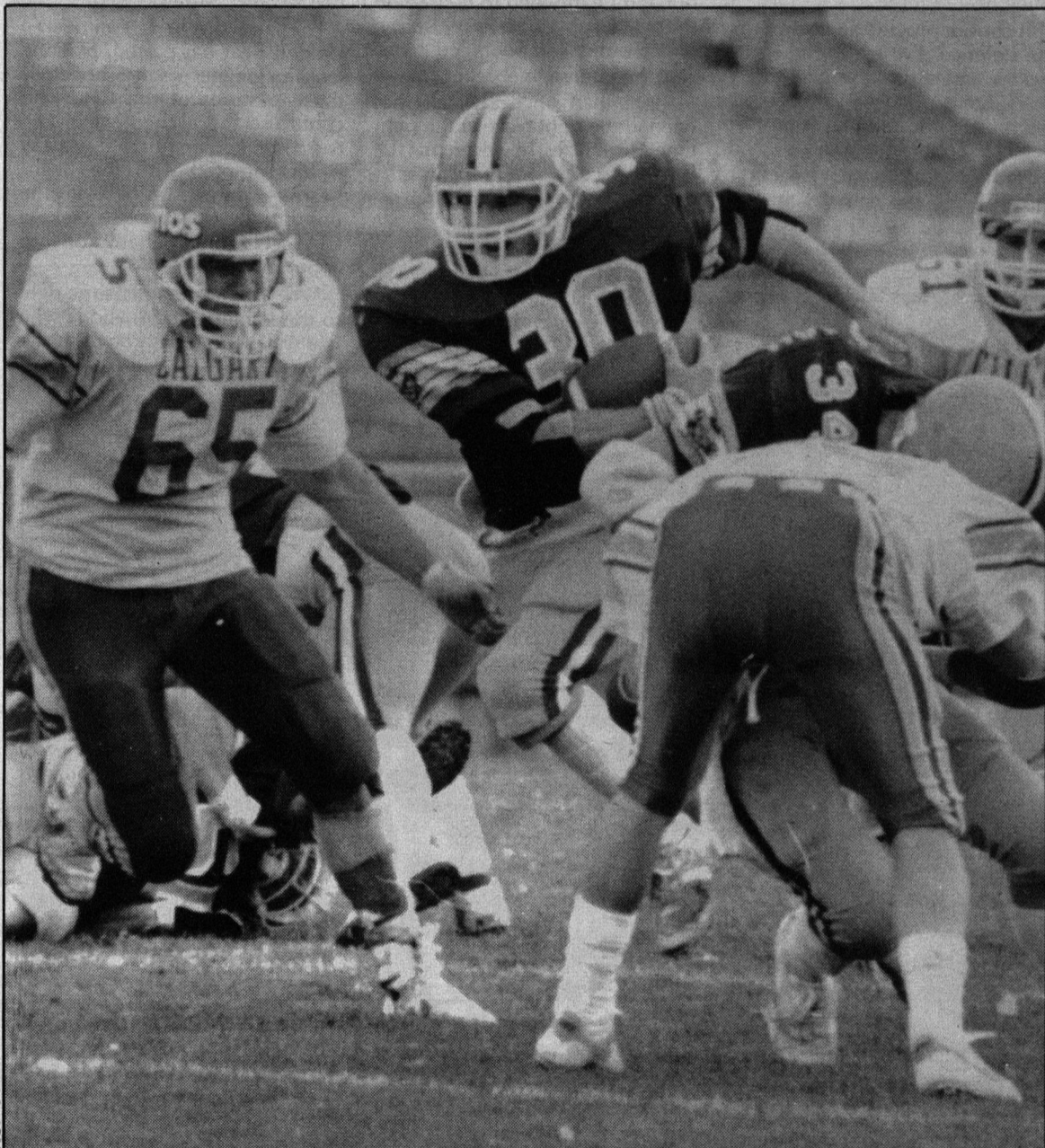
The 1989 edition of the Golden Bear football team was as talented a squad as any that coach Jim Donlevy has ever had. Unfortunately, the talent resided mostly on the defence, and the offensive game plan lacked what was necessary to put the Bears into the playoffs. For this reason the 1989 Bears football team has to rate as a disappointment.

The defence was the best in the country, Mark Singer will win C.I.A.U. Defensive Player of the year. Trent Brown will make the Ottawa Rough Riders next season. Brent Korte will get a shot in the big... so will the under-rated sure-tackling Len Sawatzky... as well as the often overlooked Todd Matheson. Did I overlook anyone? Jim Clelland is a damn fine player. Jim Toomey and hard-hitting Defensive Back John Falconer give the Bears' some solid strength on next season's defence.

The defence, though, was not the reason the Bears failed to make the playoffs. Simply put, the offensive game plan has to change. The Bears run the ball way too much. I could understand it if the Bears had a breakaway threat in the backfield, but they don't. I could maybe understand it if the Bears used the option, or the 'veer...but the smashmouthed approach fools nobody... who else used a fullback oriented offence in the 80's? Come to think about who has used it since the 50's? So next year what type of game will the Bears use... you bet, fullback oriented run game. In the process the Bears will miscast players like Darryl Szafranski for yet another season.

It should be mentioned at this point, though, that the value of a

STAUFFER — p 20



Ron Sears

Bear freshman runningback Robin Mead gets through a hole. He described his first year as a Bear as "surprising."

Freshman Robin Mead surprises

by Jay O'Neill

Rob Mead's jump from high school level football to university level football came as a complete surprise to him.

Mead came to the Bears from a successful high school career at McNally. He led the Tigers to three straight championship appearances and the Tigers came away with two victories. For his success, Mead was awarded the Hal Burton award which goes to top high school player in Edmonton.

Mead was highly recruited after he graduated from McNally. "It was surprising actually," Mead said. McGill and the University of North Dakota expressed interest in him. He chose the University of Alberta because he wanted to stay close to his home and his friends.

The first year running back was also joined in the backfield by two other rookie running backs in Jason Duxbury and Kris Thorsteinson. Mead felt having all three rookies playing the same position helped

him with his learning process. "You automatically accepted each other because we're all (as) inexperienced as the next guy."

Mead expected to learn the offence gradually, but things did not turn out that way. He was thrown into action in the first game of the season and he played in every game after that. "The whole year was a surprise," said Mead. With each game he played, his confidence level rose and "just having more confidence makes you a better runner".

He became the Bears most consistent running back rushing for 300 yards on 64 carries for a 4.6 yard average. These stats put Mead in the top five in the rushing category of the CWUAA.

Although Mead was having success on the field, he still wanted to earn the respect of the veterans on the team. This happened when players like Mark Singer or Jeff

Steinberg congratulated him after he made a good play. "If I'm accepted by him then I'm a part of the team".

After his unexpected success this year, Mead is going to work hard during the off season so he will be ready for next year. Mead's role will change next year as he becomes a veteran. He says he will try to help the rookies next year by leading by example. Next year Mead would like to see the Bears make the playoffs and for himself to have another successful year rushing the ball. He would like to have 700 yards rushing with at least a six yard average per carry.

Robin Mead had a very successful first year with the Golden Bears, but he still can't believe it. "The whole year was a surprise." There will be a lot more surprises in the future for Robin Mead, one being that he's in the running for rookie of the year.

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