

Backyard talent could save the CFL

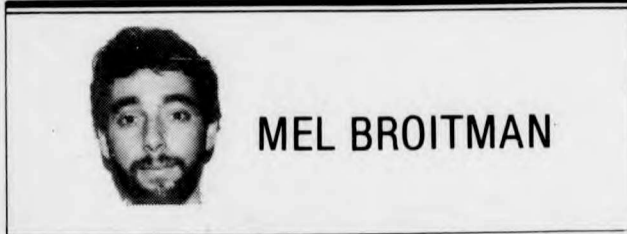
You certainly don't need a university education to realize the Canadian Football League (CFL) is in dire straits. However, a university education may have opened your eyes to the recent rise of the Canadian college football game. While we may wonder whether the Hamilton Tiger Cats will ever have to defend their Grey Cup title, there is no question that the University of British Columbia Thunderbirds will meet the challenge next fall, and seek a second successive Vanier Cup.

As he accepted the award for the Canadian Inter-University Athletic Union (CIAU) Coach of the Year two weeks ago in Toronto, Bishops University head coach Bruce Coulter said, "If there is anything the CIAU can do to help the CFL, we'd (CIAU) be most happy to do it." It now remains to be seen whether the dons of the CFL take up the CIAU on their gracious offer. For whether the CFL knows it or not—Canadian university football is the best thing going for the CFL. And the CFL doesn't have a lot going in its favour.

There is a rather simple attitude shared by those who naively expect the CFL to rebound and recapture its former years of glory. While this wishful thinking might offer temporary relief, it can never hope to grapple with the enormous problems of a nine team league where more than half of the franchises are in serious trouble.

"It's nothing new, the CFL has been in trouble before," claims the most ardent CFL supporters. What "Joe CFL" fails to realize is that the rules, stakes and circumstances have changed with the times. Presently the CFL is an old man in a new age. Without an injection of new blood, the league is doomed to die.

The CFL's glory years were in the 1950s and '60s. Up until the late '50s the CFL even enjoyed greater popularity than the then relatively inexperienced National Football League (NFL). But in those days, the CFL had a huge share of the Canadian sports entertainment market. Up until 1970, only



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two pro hockey teams were based in Canada. Now there are seven, four solidly entrenched in CFL locales. In their respective cities, the Vancouver Canucks, Edmonton Oilers, Calgary Flames and Winnipeg Jets are followed with a greater passion than the Lions, Eskimos, Stamps and Blue Bombers. Soon, even the beloved Ti-Cats will play second fiddle to an eventual NHL team in the Steel City.

In the economic and political heart of the country, CFL franchises in Montreal and Toronto are rated well behind hockey and baseball in fan interest. In fact, things have gotten so bad in Ottawa and Hamilton, that recently their owners have suggested giving the teams away to community groups.

Hopes of relieving financial burdens by way of a television contract are non-existent. When divided up, the expected \$10-12 million over three years will barely pay for 'star' quarterbacks on a few clubs. Obviously in monetary terms, the league is not a prime investment opportunity.

It's high time the CFL face facts and realistically confront their imminent extinction. The league must stop attempting to copy the 'NFL-style' approach to pro football. As modern technology beams hundreds of American games to nearly every household north of the 49th parallel, Canadians have become well acquainted with the superior product to the south. In a foreshadowing of possible free trade relations with

the US, Canadian professional football is being forced to close up shop.

It's nothing short of financial suicide to compete with the NFL. Expectations of signing high-priced American talent, filling 60,000 seat stadiums and top dollar national television revenue belong in the NFL, not the CFL. The CFL, in reality, a small-time league. It must begin to act like it.

If the CFL is to survive, it's only hope is to regulate 100 percent Canadian content. Expectations and standards need to be reassessed at realistic levels. Canadians can play the game—just on *our own* terms.

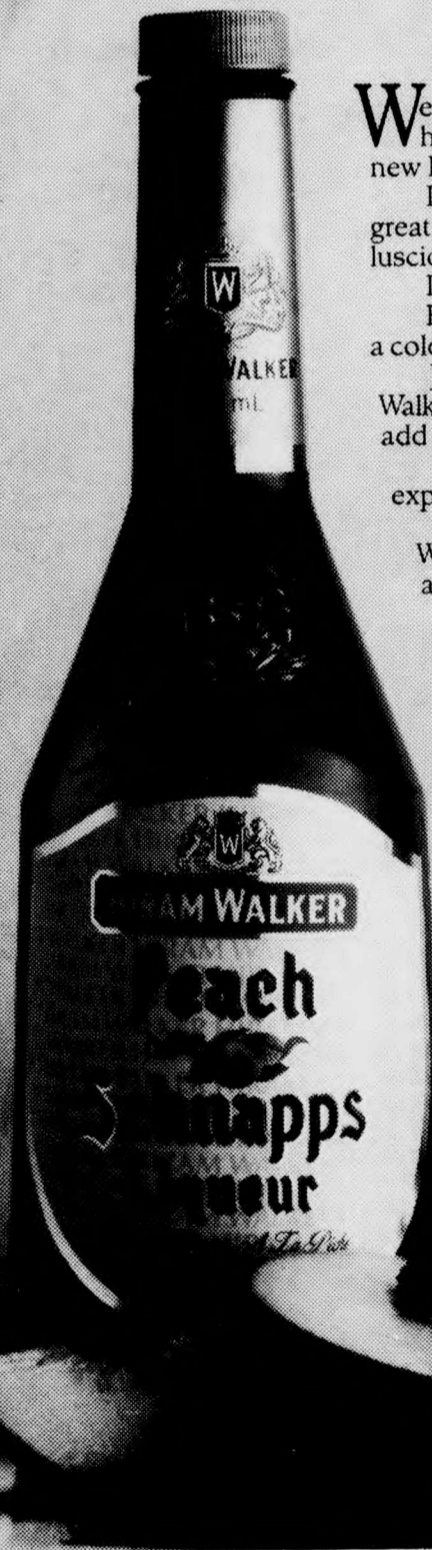
The growth of Canadian university football could not be happening at a better time for the CFL. The CIAU could become the major source of talent for an all-Canadian league. The fans would watch players develop from high school and university and follow them right into the professional ranks. Continuity and recognition, the biggest public image headaches of the CFL, would be resolved.

With 23 university teams spread throughout the country, the CFL would be constantly replenished and promoted. Reciprocally, the CFL would fuel the interest in the university game. The college player draft, a usual "non-event" in the sports pages, would join the NHL and NFL drafts as major sources of off-season publicity and excitement.

When faced with talk of its demise, the CFL and its supporters claim the league as a Canadian institution, integral to our way of life. Agreed. So why not expand upon the Canadian angle which is after all the heart of the entire enterprise?

This past weekend Canadians got together to enjoy the Grey Cup Game. But it's not of great importance that Canadian assembled to watch football—but that *Canadians* assembled. We savour the Grey Cup because it's vintage Canadiana. Ultimately it rest with Canadians to save it and the league it represents.

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Streak over for York skaters

By JAMES HOGGETT

The York Hockey Yeowomen fell victim over the weekend to a tough McMaster squad, losing their first of the year by the score of 5-2, ending their five game unbeaten streak. Coach Sue Gaston summed up the loss by saying, "We just had a bad game. These types of games can be expected every now and then."

Prior to their loss to McMaster the Yeowomen won a 4-3 victory over the Guelph Gryphons last Thursday. Barb Cromb, Bonnie McMaster, Judi Gilbert, and Trin Pettingill were the goal scorers for York and the victory gave the Yeowomen their third win of the season.

It was a tough win as the Yeowomen experienced many problems moving the puck around. "The ice surface at Guelph is very small," Gaston said. "This made it very difficult for us to play as we are used to playing on a larger ice surface." This difference in ice surface size was the main reason why York was held to only four goals despite dominating the Gryphons throughout the game.

Last Tuesday night the Yeowomen played host to the Lady Blues who snatched a victory out from the grasps of the Yeowomen.

With the Yeowomen leading 4-2 (on goals from Judi Gilbert, Kelly Vandenthillart, Bonnie McMaster and Barb Cromb), and only five minutes left to play in the third period, victory was almost assured.

However, the Blues with a "never say die" attitude, continually pressed the Yeowomen and finally paid off when the Blues scored two goals, the tying goal coming with only 32 seconds left in the game.

Coach Gaston was still pleased with the final outcome. "We did not play bad," Gaston said. "In fact, we played very tough and I am very pleased with the team's performance. We weren't trying to sit back on our two goal lead."

Toronto Blues coach David McMaster felt very lucky to come away with the single point. "After jumping out to a 2-0 lead in the first period," McMaster said, "and then trailing York by 4-2 with only five minutes left to play and coming back to tie the score, how can I be anything but pleased? Anytime you play here at York and you can come away with a point you feel lucky. York is a very strong well balanced team with a solid defence and good goaltending."