

# SPORTS FEATURE

## Nobby takes charge

York get back to basics, hiring original head coach and former Argonaut Nobby Wirkowski to guide '88 Yeomen football team

**N**obby Wirkowski, Associate Head Coach of the football Yeomen for the past four years, was named head coach two weeks ago, replacing Frank Cosentino. Wirkowski was a star quarterback at the University of Miami, where he graduated with his Bachelor of Science and Education. He rejected offers from the NFL's Chicago Bears and St. Louis Cardinals to sign with the Toronto Argonauts, who he led to a Grey Cup in 1952. Wirkowski's coaching career includes two years as assistant coach of the Toronto Argos, and another two years as head coach. In 1968 he came to York University and was the school's first football coach. At the recent Vanier Cup receptions the university football world was buzzing over Wirkowski's selection. Gus MacFarlane, former MP and former head coach of Mount Allison, commented: "If Nobby coaches the way he threw the ball York will be in the Vanier Cup." In an interview with *Excalibur* Sports Editor GARRY "HOWIE" MARR Wirkowski talked about university football and his new role as head coach at York.

**EXCALIBUR:** Where do you think athletics fall in the scope of a university?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I think the role of the university is to educate. There is an inscription on the Ross Building which says the role of education is to educate the total human being. In university there is little contact with professors. Sports and other activities give students the opportunity to get involved and have some social interaction.

**EXCALIBUR:** In Ontario there are no such things as athletic scholarships. Do you think that's far?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I am in favour of scholarships, but only on a limited basis. The university would pick up the tab for courses, but not for food and housing.

**EXCALIBUR:** Where would you like to see Canadian athletic programs in relation to their US counterparts?

**WIRKOWSKI:** Coaches in the US would love to change the system, but they have to have winning programs to pay for their schools. Scholarships are not bad, it's the violations that are.

**EXCALIBUR:** What is the difference between an American football player and his Canadian equivalent?

**WIRKOWSKI:** Canadian players are as good as Americans. If you were to take a Canadian kid and put him in an American school, and then put an American kid in a Canadian school, there is no doubt in my mind the Canadian kid would be better. In the US they teach the fundamentals in the early stages, coaching at the high school level is a full time commitment there.

**EXCALIBUR:** Do you think academic standards should be relaxed for athletes?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I don't believe in a double standard. I want a player who is sound academically and will stay in school four or five years.

**EXCALIBUR:** Do you think that sports put a strain on a student's academic education?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I think it teaches a student to budget his team wisely. There is definitely a time for sports, academics and social activity. If a kid uses his time well he is a good student.

**EXCALIBUR:** Does the amount of apathy towards sports at York get your players down?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I never see it in practices.

**EXCALIBUR:** Why are university athletic events so popular in the US?

**WIRKOWSKI:** In the US football games are a happening. Guys and girls go to the games to meet each other.

**EXCALIBUR:** What do you mean by a happening?

**WIRKOWSKI:** A football game in addition to being a social happening is also a time when parents and alumni show up. People will travel up to 500 miles to see a game.

**EXCALIBUR:** Do you think Canadian University football has improved in the last 5-10 years?

**WIRKOWSKI:** When I played for the Argos in 1952 we used to average 27,000 people a game, while U of T averaged about 22,500. We are still a ways from when I played.

**EXCALIBUR:** In terms of the quality of football has the game changed at the university level?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I think the game is much better from a technical standpoint.

**EXCALIBUR:** It seems rather ironic that while university football is increasing in popularity the CFL is almost ready to fold. In the event of the CFL's demise what effect will it have on the university game?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I think more people will show up to university games because you will find people do love the Canadian game.

**EXCALIBUR:** Is the CFL responsible for the state that is in today?

**WIRKOWSKI:** The CFL promoted its own demise by keeping games off TV. This allowed the NFL to move right in. I mean why should people pay money for a CFL game and never see them on TV when they can get all the NFL coverage they want.

**EXCALIBUR:** Is part of the CFL's problem a lack of organization?

**WIRKOWSKI:** The NFL always has five and 10 year plans, while the CFL has no plan. Every year at the end of the season the CFL sits down and decides what to do for the next year. They have done nothing to improve the talent in the league.

**EXCALIBUR:** What do you mean by improving the talent of the league?

**WIRKOWSKI:** The teams that spend money on Canadian talent are the ones that are always improving.

**EXCALIBUR:** Then you favour a more Canadian look in the CFL?

**WIRKOWSKI:** A CFL with no imports would be utopia.

**EXCALIBUR:** Is there any need for imports in the CFL and how do you cut down on the amount we have now?

**WIRKOWSKI:** You let American players into the game to improve the calibre of play, then you get rid of them and use only Canadians. I would change the designated import rule to make the American quarterback Canadian. I would also cut down imports by one for the next five years so there would only be 10 per team.

**EXCALIBUR:** What made you play CFL ball in the first place, especially when you had NFL offers?

**WIRKOWSKI:** At the time there was a



JAMES HOGGETT

**YORK'S NEWEST HEAD COACH:** Nobby Wirkowski takes over the football Yeomen next year. Wirkowski has a tough road ahead improving the 2-5 Yeomen, but he has the credentials to get the job done.

lot more money in the CFL. The dollar was also worth 10% more back then.

**EXCALIBUR:** What made you come to York and get back into coaching?

**WIRKOWSKI:** At the time the program was in trouble. I told Frank that if he went back I would too. I also had a son on the team and I wanted him to play on a winner.

**EXCALIBUR:** What went wrong with the team last year?

**WIRKOWSKI:** We started off the season strong, but self-destructed against Western. We held them to 200 yards but turned the ball over. That was our problem all last year.

**EXCALIBUR:** Was there anything positive about last year's squad?

**WIRKOWSKI:** The last two games of the season our punting unit was solid. I have confidence in our centre's ability. We also had some good spirit on the ball club. We got some solid play from our linebackers as well.

**EXCALIBUR:** What are your plans now that you are head coach?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I will be recruiting athletes to help our program. I am basically looking for everything. I would like to be able to have two players for every position on the team. I don't

want kids sitting around for two years and then being thrown into the line-up third year.

**EXCALIBUR:** Is there any aspect of the team you would like to change in particular?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I would like the players to be more confident. When we get down inside the 10 on offense I want the attitude to change from can we get in to how are we going to get in.

**EXCALIBUR:** What effect do you think your particular brand of coaching will have on the team?

**WIRKOWSKI:** We had our first team meeting last week for 1988 and I told the players what I expected. I only expect what I think they can do. I want more out of them and will be a little more demanding.

**EXCALIBUR:** What do you think your role should be as head coach?

**WIRKOWSKI:** Everybody has a God given talent, I want to bring that out of them.

**EXCALIBUR:** What is your goal for the Yeomen?

**WIRKOWSKI:** I want these guys in the Vanier Cup. I want them to get there and realize that they did it themselves; I can only educate. Most of all I want these players to be proud to be York Yeomen.

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