

Former Stampeder Wirkowski thinks Calgary to operate in '86

By EDO VAN BELKOM

Yeomen associate head football coach Nobby Wirkowski is probably best known for the pass he made in the 1952 Grey Cup game to Zeke O'Connor, giving the Toronto Argonauts a victory over the Edmonton Eskimos. It was the last Grey Cup win for the Argos until they finally defeated the BC Lions in 1983. Besides that memorable year in Toronto, Wirkowski spend nine others in the Canadian Football League split between Toronto, Hamilton and Calgary.

Wirkowski was a quarterback with the Stampeders for three years from 1957 to 59 and he remembers his time there as successful, "I thought we were successful. We would win our exhibition games and then our first four our five season games and then injuries would set in. American talent we had, Canadian talent we did not have," Wirkowski said. "We would get into the playoffs but we never won any Grey Cups."

Wirkowski's recollections of the city of Calgary in the late 50's resemble nothing of the Calgary many of us know today. "In those days Calgary was known as 'Cowtown.' One of the first games I played in Cana-

"It would be a shame really to see them go down the drain"

dian football was in 1951 in Calgary. I remember landing in this airport that just looked like a little shed. It looked like a garage put out in the middle of no man's land.

"The fan support back then in Calgary was very good, but you have to remember that we played in Mewata Stadium. We only had to fill a 9,000 seat stadium where today that seats in excess of 40,000."

Although the Calgary Stampeder fans of today have gone into hibernation Wirkowski is quick to note that the festivities that we have come to know as Grey Cup week were originated by Calgary fans. "The Grey Cup used to be just another game to decide the championship of football in Canada. In '46 or '47 when Calgary was in the Grey Cup, they brought horses and chuckwagons into Toronto and filled the lobby of the Royal York Hotel with them.

"They were the ones that started it

and it would be a shame really, to see them go down the drain."

According to Wirkowski the demise of the Stampeders comes as no surprise due to a number of contributing factors. The Calgary Flames have taken over as the number one game in town, and the Stamps haven't had a successful team since 1971. Wirkowski also says that the city is suffering from a recession after its recent boom period but says the most important problem is a lack of marketing. Using the Toronto Blue Jays as the Canadian sports marketing success story, he says that the attitude in Canadian football is "here we are come see us play." While the Blue Jays have made all of Canada their market, interest in Canadian football has waned.

Despite all the negative factors involved, Wirkowski still feels confident that the Stampeders will take to the field in the 1986 season. "I still think the Stampeders are going to operate. Those people who were once football fans but stayed away have come back because now their product is in jeopardy. Their pride has now been hurt," Wirkowski said.

But if the franchise in Calgary should fall, he feels it will have a very definite effect on the league. "To this point in time a CFL team hasn't fallen," Wirkowski said, discounting the name and ownership change of the Montreal franchise. "It would be a first in modern times and it could

have a domino effect on the rest of the league. The first one would be the toughest to swallow, the second would be just that much easier."

If the fall of a professional football team in Canada has a ripple effect on the rest of the league, one might think that disinterest in the sport could trickle down and have a negative effect on the Canadian college game, but according to Wirkowski this won't happen. "The fall of the Calgary Stampeders or the CFL is not going to have any effect on Canadian College football. Certainly, they don't help us out. If they (the CFL) gave us a dollar amount to help support the college game, then their demise may mean something, but as

of now no."

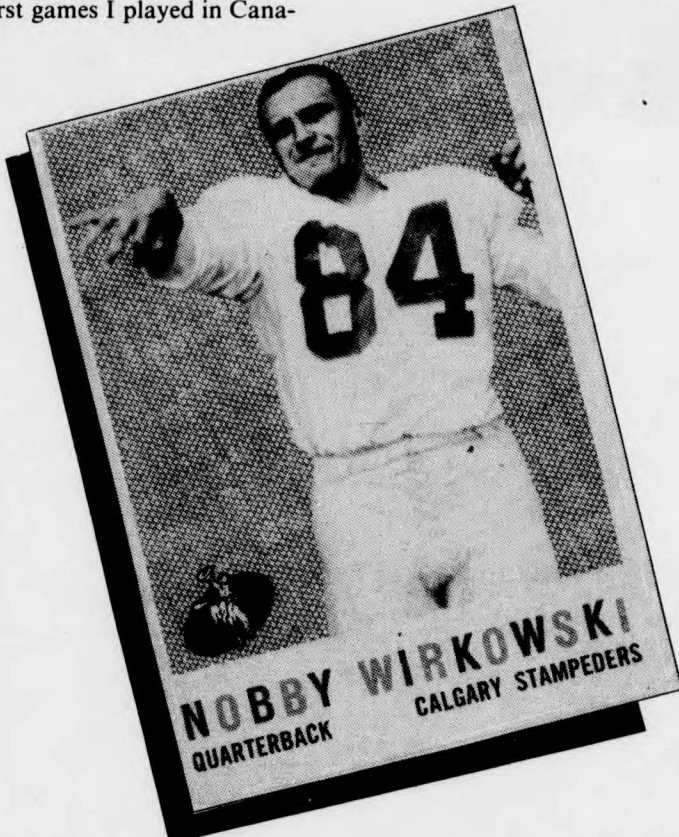
A more immediate effect from the demise of the Stampeders will be felt by college players who are under contract to the pro club, players like Yeoman running back Joe Pariselli. Pariselli has plans to try out at the Calgary training camp this year, but without a team his pro career may be in trouble. "I'm not aware of the CFL having a form of distribution for players under contract," Wirkowski said. "If they don't have a formula, the other eight teams will have to sit down and decide how to distribute the ball players."

So the fate of Joe Pariselli is the fate of the Calgary Stampeders, is the fate of the CFL. But it is reassuring to know that even if there is an end to professional football in Canada, there will always be the Yeomen.



ROBERTA DI MAIO

TODAY: Wirkowski began York's football program in 1968. In 1985 he was the Yeomen's Associate head coach.



CARDED ATHLETE: This football card from the 1959 CFL season shows a youthful Wirkowski.

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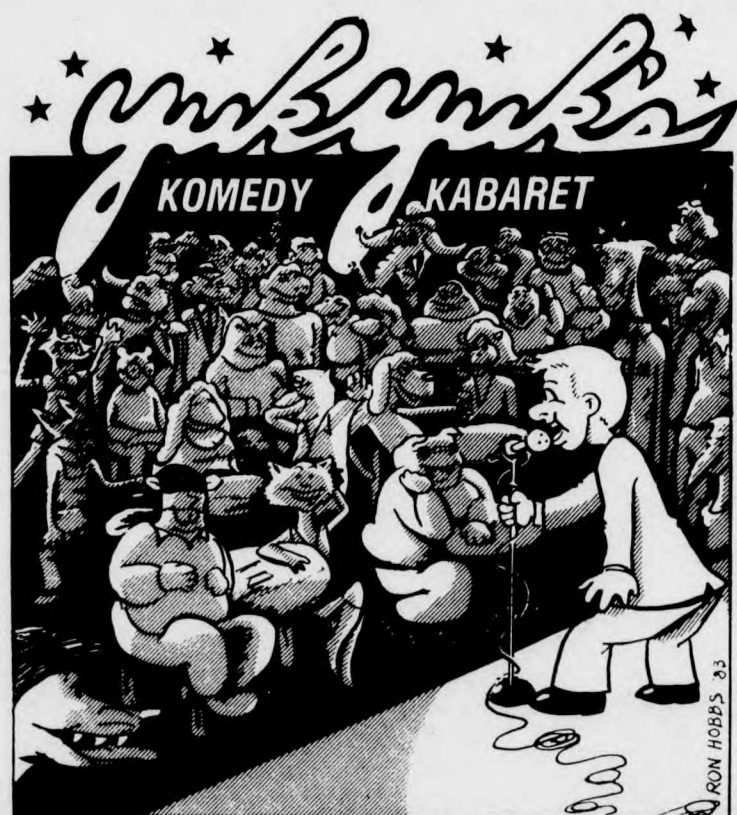
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