



# VIEW From The Cheap Seats

By Mark Savoie

I know that no one east of the Prairies cares, but the CFL is well into one of their most interesting seasons in years. Once again, Doug Flutie—the most exciting quarterback in the world—is leading the Calgary Stampeders on another run to the Grey Cup. He did the same thing last year, however, only to be derailed on a sloppy field by the archrival Edmonton Eskimos. Don't bet on it happening again; Flutie's game is perfectly suited for the CFL.

The Stampeders are not the real story in the league this year. That honour instead goes to the Baltimore CFL feisty young stallions. This team, based in the city that once hosted the NFL's Colts (now in Indianapolis), has been attracting over 40,000 people to its home games on a regular basis. The CFL added two other American teams for this season as well: the Shreveport Pirates and the Las Vegas Posse (not too subtly Freudian, is it?). These three teams joined the Sacramento Goldminers to give the CFL a strong presence in the United States.

Actually, only the Baltimore team is doing well. Shreveport and Sacramento are holding their own, but there is some doubt whether the Mickey Mouse Las Vegas squad will be able to complete the season. The Vegas team has seemingly tried to integrate burlesque with professional sports, but it appears that even the decadence that is Las Vegas is not quite ready to make that leap as of yet.

So taken is the CFL with their success in Baltimore that they have scheduled the 1996 Grey Cup for that city. This may prove to be disastrous. The four American teams have yet to show that they are legitimate threats to make a run at the Grey Cup, and it is doubtful how many Baltimoreans will attend a Grey Cup between Calgary and Winnipeg. In fact, when it is realised that the Grey Cup is not nearly the same cultural icon in the States as is the Super Bowl (it isn't even the same cultural icon in Canada as is the Super Bowl in the States), it becomes doubtful how many Baltimoreans will attend a Grey Cup that does not have Baltimore as one of its teams, even if one or both of the teams come from other American cities.

Still, I applaud the CFL for taking the risk. The CFL is on the verge of exploding upon the American football scene. It is likely, as is the case with so many ventures that come close to success, that the CFL will fail; that the NFL will prove so powerful that all of the CFL's inroads will be beaten back.

The NFL is already beginning to respond to the challenge of the CFL. Despite its many dinosaur tendencies, the NFL has taken steps to open up its passing game and has allowed the two point conversion; both measures taken directly from the CFL. Some things, however, the NFL won't be able to change because of its dinosaur status. The CFL will forever have its wider field and three down football to its advantage. It will remain an inherently more exciting league.

When the CFL first started considering expansion into the USA, I was extremely leery. I felt that it would be a sell-out to American interests. In retrospect, I can't quite figure out why I felt that way. It seems to me now as one of the best ways to export Canadian culture to Big Brother down south since we exported the Stanley Cup to Seattle in 1917 and the NHL to Boston in 1924. The CFL has a chance, albeit a slim one, to become a Major League in professional football, rather than being the perennial weak sister it has become in recent decades. Therefore, even though I bemoan the proposed name change from the Canadian Football League to the Continental Football League, I also applaud the CFL for having the courage to take this bold step into America.



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