



FOOTBALL CANADA

1884 - IAN SPEERS

Introduction

Despite being overlooked by many past researchers, I believe that the following text will show that many important themes and structures in Canadian football first emerged between 1880 and 1891: themes which have continued to be a part of Canadian football to the present. The American influence on the game appears in its earliest forms with disputes over the scrimmage system to be used in Canada. Additionally, the early governing bodies from which modern Canadian football leagues emerged: the IRFU (now CFL East) and CIRFU (the predecessor of the OUA football league) both grew from the Ontario and Quebec Rugby Football Unions in 1907 and 1898 respectively, and the Canadian Rugby Union of 1891 continues today as Football Canada.

It is my sincere hope that this work will stimulate greater historical interest in the pre-Grey Cup era of Canadian football, and result in a greater understanding and appreciation of Canada's rich sporting heritage.

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1884

ORFU held its annual meeting on 28 January 1884 at the Rossin House, Toronto. A. H. Campbell delivered the annual report of the executive, in which he noted the success of the eleven Union matches played the previous year, and also expressed delight at the successful enforcement of uniform rules across the province. The ORFU rules had not only been a success in Ontario, but had also been endorsed by Quebec's prestige college club: McGill (1). The goal of a Canadian Union had yet to be attained, the Ontario Union's "efforts not having been met by the Quebec clubs" (2). The report of the treasurer noted financial success for the first season, the accounts reading as follows:

Receipts

Subscriptions, 14 clubs	\$42.00
Gate, final ties	\$30.40
Sales, "Laws of Game"	<u>\$14.00</u>

\$86.40

Disbursements

Printing	\$21.00
Postage	\$7.35
Stationary	\$1.15
Expenses, first meeting	\$4.50
Photograph	\$6.00
Telegram	\$2.48
Sundries	\$0.70
Cash balance	<u>\$43.22</u>
(3)	\$86.40

The attention of the delegates then turned to the Ottawa protest of the previous year's championship game. Ottawa maintained that Merritt's membership in the Toronto F. C. was in contravention of the rules of competition, and that the game should therefore be voided by virtue of this technicality. The union maintained that the second portion of the rule--"In the final tie the executive reserve the right to appoint umpires and referee"--gave the union the right to chose whomsoever they desired for the position. Discussion became somewhat polarised, and after failing to sway the convention Ottawa agreed to drop the matter. The delegates did adopt a motion that altered the rules of competition to prevent future recurrences of this same problem: "In the final ties the executive reserve the right to appoint the umpires and referee, neither of whom shall belong to the competing club." (4)

Campbell presented the results of a subscription for the Championship Cup, which had begun with a circular the previous April soliciting funds for the new trophy. An amount of \$193 had been raised prior to the meeting, from which some \$4.85 would need to be deducted to pay for the cost of distributing soliciting material the previous year. As the contributions were being read, Hamilton volunteered another \$50.00 for the effort, bringing the budget for the cup up to some \$240 (5). It was again decided to utilise a tie schedule for the Union matches for the season, and after making a few technical alterations to the constitution, a new executive was selected as the final order of business:

President: W. C. Carruthers, R. M. C.

Vice President: P. M. Bankier, Hamilton

Secretary-Treasurer: A. H. Campbell, Toronto F. C.

Committee: T. H. Stinson, Hamilton; W. W. Jones, Trinity Coll.; A. C. Macdonnell, R. M. C.; E. H. Blake, Toronto F. C.; J. P. Nutting, Ottawa; H. B. Cronyn, Varsity; G. Gordon, U. C. C.
(5a)

The drive to form a Canadian Union finally succeeded just a few days later. On 7 February, a meeting was held in Montreal between representatives of the Ontario and Quebec Unions, at which it was agreed to form a Canadian Rugby Football Union. The object of the national body

was to be "the furtherance of Rugby football" in Canada and also the adoption of a uniform set of rules (6). Selected as president was W. H. Merritt of Toronto, with H. M. Belcher of Montreal being named Vice-President and R. Campbell, also of Montreal and who had chaired the meeting, named Secretary-Treasurer. A. H. Campbell, who had acted as secretary of this formative meeting, was named along with Mr. Blake (Toronto FBC) and Mr. R. Campbell (Montreal) to a committee tasked with drafting a uniform set of rules for consideration at a meeting to be held in the summer (7). Before adjourning, a vote of thanks was passed to A. H. Campbell "for his energy in forwarding the formation of the union" (8).

The meeting to complete arrangements for the Canadian Rugby Football Union was held on 1 July 1884, at Rossin House, Toronto. Under the direction of Union president W. Hamilton Merritt, the matter of the uniform code of rules was the first agendum of the day. Those present made a rule-by-rule consideration of the ORFU rules against those of the New English Rugby Union Football Rules, and made a few alterations: the "tedious, rough and unsatisfactory" maul in goal was struck from the laws; an addition was made to stop "heeling out" from the scrum, which made it an off side offence to pass back through the scrum; and deliberately lying on the ball was also made a foul (9). The restriction on the heeling of the ball reaffirmed the commitment of the CRFU to retain a system of scrum based on that of Rugby, namely that the ball could not be kicked back toward one's own goal line; anything approaching the American style of scrums was thus rejected. The point system of the ORFU was adopted, but with a reduction of value for drop kicked field goals from 7 to 6 points (9a). The idea of interprovincial matches was put off for the time being, but a provision was passed for the champions of the Quebec and Ontario Unions to play one another for the championship of Canada at the conclusion of the 1884 season (10). The constitution of the body, as adopted, read as follows:

1. The Union shall be called the CANADIAN RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION.
2. It shall consist of six delegates from each Provincial Union which has three or more organised clubs; and Union having less than three Clubs shall be entitled to two representatives.
3. The object of the Union shall be the furtherance of Rugby Football in general, including the adoption and enforcement of a uniform code of laws in the Dominion, and establishment of a Championship of Canada, and Inter-provincial Matches.
4. The Union shall elect its own officers at the annual meeting; they shall consist of an Hon. President, Vice-President, and Secretary Treasurer.
5. The annual membership fee from each Provincial Union shall be Ten dollars.
6. The annual meeting shall be held at such time and place, before March, as the officers may determine; notice of the same is to be given one month beforehand to the Secretaries of the Provincial Unions.
7. All questions or disputes referred to the Union shall be decided by correspondence, unless considered by the officers of the Union of sufficient importance to be held over to the annual meeting. At all meetings seven shall form a quorum. Notices calling meetings must contain a summary of the business to come before the meeting.
8. Alterations in the Laws of the Game, and the Constitution of the Union, shall be made only at annual meetings, and by a two-thirds vote of those present at the meeting. Notice of the proposed alteration shall be given in writing to the Secretary of the Union at least

three weeks before the date of the meeting, and notice of such proposed alteration shall be at once forwarded to each member of the Union by the Secretary. (11)

At the end of the set of rules approved by the CRFU was added a brief note, requesting that sportsmanship and upholding the spirit of the game should be paramount in observing the rules:

THE CANADIAN RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION view with grave apprehension the fact that a number of clubs now seem to make a point of playing according to the letter instead of the spirit of the law, and at the same time recognise that it is impossible, and ought to be unnecessary to legislate against this evil. They earnestly appeal to the different clubs in Canada to unite in an effort to suppress this quibbling spirit, leaving laws for the book, when their absence does not interfere with the real intention of the grand old Rugby Game. (11a)

The ORFU 1884 schedule again consisted of ties in three divisions, but Ontario Agricultural College retired from the union, their place in the West District being taken by Strathroy's club. Trinity College and Upper Canada College both withdrew their names from Cup competition, but remained members of the union (12). The results of the 1884 divisional ties in October were identical in results to those of the previous year: Hamilton, Toronto and Ottawa all breezed through their respective districts. Hamilton hosted Toronto on 25 October for the penultimate tie, which the Toronto club won handily 24-4. The ORFU final was set for 1 November at Toronto, between the Toronto and Ottawa clubs. The game was greatly anticipated by football enthusiasts in the Toronto region: some 300 tickets were sold by 31 October, and a train party was expected from Hamilton with a like number of fans (13). But on the evening of 30 October, the Ottawa club secretary Jason F. Cunningham sent the following telegram to the Toronto Football Club:

Our committee, after very careful consideration, are reluctantly obliged to forfeit our match with Toronto for championship. Seven of our first team, for various causes, find it utterly impossible to leave town, and we cannot fill their places. Will write tomorrow. (14)

The withdrawal took Toronto by surprise, and the club tried unsuccessfully to persuade Ottawa to send any possible combination of fifteen men so as not to disappoint the Toronto fans. A further attempt to get a Hamilton team to visit Toronto for an exhibition game likewise failed because of the short notice (15). Toronto had thus won the Challenge Cup for the second time in as many years, and was thus to represent the province in the Dominion final--the first game under the direct authority of the new CRFU.

The Quebec champion Montreal Football Club was sent to Toronto on 6 November to contest the championship. The game was held on the University of Toronto Lawn (now referred to as "Front Campus" at the same university), immediately south of the dignified façade of the University College building. Montreal dressed on red and black jerseys, and Toronto appeared in maroon tops (16). The game was a one-sided affair for the Quebec champions, who shut out the Toronto team and scored 14 points in the first half alone. Toronto went scoreless for the entire game, and was cleanly defeated 30-0 by Montreal, who could rightly claim to be the first undisputed Rugby champions of Canada (17).

Only a few days later, on 8 November, Harvard made a trip to Ottawa to play the Ottawa College team--one of the last trips Harvard footballers would make to Canada. In the first half, the two teams used the eleven-a-side American College rules, which included low tackling, running interference and the "snap back" system of putting the ball in play. The match served as an exhibition of these foreign rules for an Ottawa audience, and even though Harvard soundly defeated the Ottawa team 20-6, the game was an enjoyable success for both competing teams (18).

Notes

1 - Daily Mail, 28 January 1884

2 - *ibid.*

3 - *ibid.*

4 - *ibid.*

5 - *ibid.*

5a - *ibid.*

6 - Montreal Gazette, 9 February 1884

7 - *ibid.*

8 - *ibid.*

9 - Daily Mail, 4 July 1884; for the full codified laws of the game, see Canadian Rugby Football Union Constitution and Laws of the Game, 1884, CIHM 00945

9a - *ibid.*

10 - *ibid.*

11 - CRFU Constitution and Laws of the Game, 1884.

11a - *ibid.* As no copy of the 1883 ORFU rule book is known to exist, it is at present impossible to say whether this note may antedate the formation of CRFU.

12 - ORFU Report of the Executive for the year 1884, published in Mail, 26 January 1885

13 - Mail, 1 November 1884

14 - *ibid.*

15 - *ibid.*

16 - Globe, 7 November 1884

17 - For a more detailed description of this game, consult Robert Sproule's article "The First Canadian Championship", originally published in The Coffin Corner Vol. IV, 1982 but most readily available in Montreal Alouettes Media Guide 1999.

18 - A Reference File for those...