



FOOTBALL CANADA

100 YEARS OF GROWTH

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For one hundred years, the growth of football in Canada has been the primary and paramount interest of the Canadian Amateur Football Association (CAFA). And just as the game itself changed over those one hundred years, so to has the CAFA. One hundred years ago, William Hamilton Merritt was it's first president when it came into existence on October 21, 1882; it was then known as the Canadian Rugby Union (CRU). It was formally changed to CAFA in late 1966.

The sport known as "football" has a long and storied history. In it's early beginnings, any object that could roll might be kicked towards a goal. Different locales might have their own rules but each played what it considered to be football. The one thing that all the rules had in common was that it was a kicking game; carrying or handling the ball was illegal. But in 1823, at Rugby, England, on the site of the prestigious Public School, all of that changed. William Webb Ellis "with a fine disregard for the rules", his tombstone states, picked up the ball and began to run with it. The opposition, naturally was in hot pursuit while his teammates, once they recovered from their initial astonishment, followed him, looking to keep possession by passing the ball back and forth among each other and away from the other side. From that haphazard beginning, another brand of football, named after Rugby School, was carried throughout the British Empire wherever the school's graduates went.

By 1865, through British immigration, the Garrisons and the Imperial civil servants, the Rugby influence was such that organized games were being played among the "gentlemen" of Montreal and Garrison personnel. Within a short time, a team was formed at McGill University and it was arranged to play Harvard University in a friendly match of "football". Upon their arrival in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the May 14, 1874, contest, McGill discovered that Harvard played the soccer type of football with a round ball as opposed to Rugby football with it's oval ball. To make the best out of an awkward situation, it was decided that two games would be played. In the first, May 14, 1874, Harvard, under it's rules was victorious by a 3-0 score. The second game, May 15, 1874, caused a flurry of excitement. McGill's oval ball was nowhere to be found. Forced to play with a round ball, the best McGill could do was a scoreless draw. But McGill's version of Rugby was a resounding success; the editor of the Harvard Magenta described it as much more lively "than the sleepy game our men now play!" The Harvard team also liked it and immediately sent to Rugby, England, for the "official" rules. Within a year they had convinced other north eastern United States Schools to adopt the game. In a short time, the Americans changed the game to make it less influenced by chance and more determined by

design, changes which in turn were to cross the border once again, this time to influence the Canadian game.

When the CRU was formed in 1882, football was played in Quebec and Ontario at a level where there was a desire to determine a “Dominion Champion”. Each province played by somewhat different rules. In fact, 1882 was a year of revolutionary change in the rules of Canadian Rugby football. Gone was the traditional “scrum”, replaced by the ball being put into play by being “heeled out” to the quarterback. Eventually, in 1921, the heeling out would be replaced by a “snap back system”. The change in the rules was not universally accepted. After an initial victory of 30-0 by Quebec in 1883, interprovincial matches became all but impossible. Ontario eventually seceded from the Union in 1886 and for the next five years, a process of healing and reconciliation took place, culminating in the re-organization of the Canadian Rugby Union on December 19, 1891.

A.H. Campbell Jr. of the Toronto Football Club, was elected President by the delegates from the Quebec and Ontario Rugby Football Unions. The new code of rules adopted was basically that of the Ontario Union, perhaps reason enough for the score in the Dominion Championship game. Osgoode Hall of the Ontario Union defeated the Montreal Football Club of the Quebec Union by a 45-5 score. It’s interesting to note the scoring system in vogue: “a goal kicked from a Try shall score six points; from a drop kick 5 points; from a flying kick or free kick 4; a Try shall score 4; a safety touch 2 and a rouge 1.”

Football continued to grow and attract large followings. The Intercollegiate Union was formed in 1897; the Interprovincial Union in 1907. The latter was an amalgam of the two strongest teams from each of the Quebec and Ontario Unions and was known colloquially as the “Big Four”. It had great popular support. In the West, football was being followed with much enthusiasm in Manitoba and the new provinces (1905) of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Manitoba had been elected to honorary membership in the CRU in 1892, and in 1911, it combined with Unions from the other two provinces to form the Western Canada Rugby Football Union. One of the first items of business was to request the opportunity to play for the Dominion Championship of 1911 and 1912. The CRU turned down the request, citing “the great distances that intervene”.

One of the catalysts of growth for the sport was a new trophy donated by the Governor General Earl Grey for the “Amateur Rugby Football Championship of Canada”.

Although the Cup was first competed for in 1909, the University of Toronto being the first winners, the CRU did not assume trusteeship of it until March of 1921. The Grey Cup became so hotly contested and such a sought after symbol, particularly after 1921 when the West challenged for the first time, that many of the CRU’s meetings and decisions were necessary as a result of attempts by clubs to gain as much of an advantage as possible in order to win the coveted Cup. Of course, it wasn’t only in “Senior” football that the CRU was active. It was also responsible for governing and conducting championships at the Intermediate and Junior levels of football in Canada. But it was the “Senior” that occupied most of the governing body’s time. Rules were always a problem, each Union thinking and believing that changes it proposed and accepted for itself should become part of the CRU sanctioned Grey Cup Game. Other factors influencing the development of the game occurred with the introduction of the snap back system in 1921, the

forward pass for all unions in 1931, and the creeping amount of interference allowed since the Intercollegiate and Interprovincial Unions approved four yards interference beginning in 1920.

Then too, there was the question of Amateurism. In its beginnings, football was always played by those who had time, as a social occasion. Skill wasn't paramount; the game, and the chance to make and renew acquaintances was. Many of the football teams were part of a larger Club, often Rowing; the players lived in the community in which they played. During the Depression oddly enough particularly with the introduction of the forward pass (it had been used for the first time in the west in 1929 but not universally adopted across the country until 1931) there was an active search for skilled players. All of this being done while "observing" the rules of amateurism, not always, it might be said, with public knowledge. Some people added a fourth "A" to the name of the MAAA Winged Wheelers, winners of the 1931 Grey Cup with the Syracusan Warren Stevens at Quarterback, calling it the Montreal Almost Amateur Athletic Association.

The rush for other teams to import quarterbacks was second only to the one started by the Winnipeg Football Club in 1935. (They were to gain, their name "Blue Bombers" after the career of Joe Louis, the Brown Bomber, attracted a following). Winnipeg defeated the Hamilton Tigers 18-12 in the 1935 Grey Cup game, winning the trophy for the first time for the west. Much of their success was credited to the nine Americans Manager Joe Ryan was able to sign for \$7400. When a "Residence Rule" would not work to limit the number of imports, the CRU decided, in 1946, to legalize the number of Americans per team. It was five that year but as teams became more and more eager to find more and better talent to play the game, which was becoming more and more akin to and influenced by the American, the number increased. The concept of Amateurism became an unnecessary burden.

Then too, so where other Unions. There was continual pressure from the stronger leagues to restrict the teams, which could compete for the Grey Cup. First to leave was the Intercollegiate Union, their last official representative having challenged in 1932. During the years 1909-1925, the Intercollegiate had been the strongest in the country but by the mid - thirties it had fallen far behind. Then too, there was the Quebec Union. Ever since 1907, and the formation of the Interprovincial and the departure of Montreal and Ottawa, the Quebec Union was unable to field a strong team. The Ontario Union held on the longest but in 1955, it was declared by both the Big Four and the West that they would not schedule the venerable ORFU into the playdowns for the Grey Cup. It was a severe blow, a death knell, for the smaller centres and their teams. The Kitchener Waterloo Dutchmen, Sarnia Imperials, Brantford Redmen and Toronto Balmy Beach had through the years played some excellent football, both the Beaches and the Imperials having been former Grey Cup Champions in the past. An era was over.

Now, there were nine strong teams in Canada - the B.C. Lions had come into being in 1954. The East and West decided to govern their own affairs and in 1956 formed the Canadian Football Council, the forerunner of the Canadian Football League begun in 1958. As well, during that year, 1956, the nine clubs were able to gain voting control of the CRU. The business of football had become paramount and it was obvious that the CRU had to re-define its role in order to become a viable force in football once again.

In 1966, prior to the playing of the Grey Cup game between Ottawa and Saskatchewan, the CRU handed over the trusteeship of the Grey Cup to the CFL. It then changed its name to become the Canadian Amateur Football Association (CAFA).

While it was obvious that the CFL had its own plans for the growth of elite football, the newly named CAFA was to become the governing body for amateur or development football in Canada. The national body, in coordination with Provincial Associations, acts as a communications network gathering and distributing information to assist in the development of the game as well as being the official spokesman for amateur football to the Federal government and for the betterment of the game.

There are three general aims of the CAFA:

1. To develop all aspects of the game;
2. To increase the number of participants and promote physical fitness;
3. To promote amateur football throughout Canada.

Its specific objectives are:

- a. To increase the caliber of the game of football by upgrading the coaches, players, officials, trainers and administrators.
- b. To establish conditions conducive to the safety of the game through research, rule changes and equipment improvement.
- c. To provide a communication network for amateur football for all interested people.
- d. To obtain sufficient funds to maintain efficient operations toward all goals.

The re-organization has been successful. Throughout the country, there has been a true revival of an old game.

High school, college, university, bantam, midget, junior and senior leagues continue their presence throughout the country in the traditional "tackle", full equipment variety of the game. As well, there has been a phenomenal growth in the "flag" or "touch" version of the game. The skills of throwing, catching, kicking and running are forming the nucleus of a new recreational version of an old game, a version which at its highest level culminates in the National Touch Championship in early November. There, at the "Touch Bowl" competition, National Senior, Intermediate, Recreational and Women's champions are declared.

And so as the CAFA begins its 101st year, the game which it has nurtured for one hundred years continues to grow. And the reasons are not hard to find. People will continue to play football because it is fun, a challenge. There is an element of competition but also a fostering of co-operation while players work with each other towards a common goal. The many and varied skills of the game ensure a position on the team for everyone. Research conducted by the CAFA indicates that football can promote assertiveness in a youth, can enhance social interactions as well as the ability to work co-operatively. Moreover, the youngster becomes more realistic, practical and forthright; a system is taught and one learns to work within it. As the youngster does well at the game, a feeling of self worth develops leading to a clearer self-identity. Needs

and interests are submerged in order to attain a common goal. The fulfillment of the task assigned, no matter how insignificant and lacking in social reward helps contribute to the success of the group effort.

High praise indeed for a game. But ask any one of the many thousands across this country who play it. They'll tell you that it's so! Happy Birthday, CAFA!