

FIVE MINUTE MAJOR: True Canadiana

By Jake Courtepatte

It's true that the name 'Canadian Football League' is not very indicative of the dominant nationality of its employees. Of the maximum 44 players on a CFL roster, only 21 are required to be a Canadian citizen. Compare that to the number of Canadians in our nation's favourite pastime, the good old hockey game, of which almost 50% of the NHL is a Canuck, despite only seven of thirty teams north of the border.

And yet, November's Grey Cup positively reeks of Canadiana.

From a wacky scoring system where it's all but possible for a team to lead 27-1, to the excitement of going to the air so often trying to gain those ten yards in just three downs, the CFL is uniquely ours. The down-to-earth charm of the CFL is matched by the allure of the unknown, where every game is anyone's game.

In what other league can a franchise in its second professional season go from a 2-16 record to vying for the championship the next year?

The 103rd Grey Cup is set for this Sunday in Winnipeg as a clash between the Western champion Edmonton Eskimos and the East's Ottawa Redblacks. While the Eskimos rode the hot hands of quarterback Mike Reilly to a two-major win over the Calgary Stampeders to book their ticket, the RedBlacks' Henry Burris completed an incredible 93-yard touchdown pass to Greg Ellingson with just over a minute remaining to stun the Hamilton TiCats 35-28.

Only in the CFL.

One of these two teams will be handed the prestigious trophy on Sunday, by members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police no less, for the 103rd time since the league's beginnings on Rosedale field in Toronto in 1909. Your guess is as good as mine who those victors might be.

One thing to remember is there is no sure thing when it comes to the Grey Cup. The tides can change in an instant in a CFL game, and what better talking point do Canadians have than the weather?

It was brave of the organizers to place the Grey Cup game in a Manitoban November for the fourth time in its history, but Mother Nature may actually take a back seat in this one. Environment Canada is predicting sun with a high of -5 C, with the low dropping just into the negative double digits.

But who knows? The 1950s had a Mud Bowl, where Toronto's Varsity Stadium turned into a quagmire in which only one touchdown was enough. The 60s had a Fog Bowl, when players and fans alike lost sight of the field, forcing play to resume in the fourth quarter the next day. The 70s had an Ice Bowl, dubbed by some as the 'Staples Game' after players shot staples into their cleats to gain some traction on the icy field.

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Still, this is 2015. This weekend's crowd of 36,000+ is to be treated to heated tents, interactive activities galore, a gala dinner, and an alumni luncheon. Millions will watch the game from the comfort of their recliner, namely this reporter. For one weekend in the snowy months in Canada, hockey takes a back seat to Canadian football.

It's imperative to note that Governor General Albert Grey had initially hoped his donated cup would go to hockey champions. The CFL could never compete with the NHL for a Canadian audience, or the NFL for the American viewership of their often more talented brethren.

But the league continues to survive because of its unique quirks. After a complete failure in an expansion to the United States in the late 80s and early 90s, the CFL emerged stronger than it had been in decades. Canadians embraced the CFL for what it is - a wild ride based on the joys of the game, far more than just the politics and player salaries. Fans have come to terms with the fact that the CFL will never be the NFL, and for that the timid nature of being different has become one to be embraced.

Just ask any member of Rider Nation when Saskatchewan is town - I'm sure they can tell you their thoughts on Canadian football.