

Rough Riders and Other Canadian Animals

by Matthew DORRELL

Heading west in search of fame and fortune, you find only the west. Disillusioned, you settle in Moose Jaw, a city so swept up in civic pride and ambition that it was named after a bone, rather than an entire beast. Years later, settled comfortably in amongst the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Moose Jaw, you decide to start your own rugby club. Searching for a name, you decide against the obvious choice: The Moose Jaw Moose. Moose may be noble, majestic, even deadly creatures, but their preferred method of killing prey - by toppling drunkenly through car windshields - seems to be a poor analogy for the kind of sports team you're trying to build. And so the Moose Jaw Tigers are born.

You weren't that bright, but at least you weren't lonely: When the Calgary City Rugby Football Club changed to the Calgary Tigers in 1908, it became the third Tiger-titled Football/Rugby Team (the Hamilton Tigers being the second) among the fractured and oft feuding sports organizations that would eventually become the CFL. Indeed, the Tiger, that feared predator that stalked the lush Canadian savannas, loomed large in the Canadian sports psyche. Sadly, both Tiger related sports teams, and the Tiger itself - eventually driven to extinction by the ever-expanding continental railroad and encroaching urban centres - would not survive in Canada. In 1950 the last of the dynasty, the Hamilton Tigers, were amalgamated with the Hamilton Wildcats. Unsure of which cat best represented their new approach to football, the two teams compromised by combining the two titles, and thus the Hamilton Ti-cats were born. Today you'd be hard pressed to find many who remember the glory days of the tiger, in sport, or in the treacherous Canadian wilderness.

Not so the Canadian contingent of soldiers sent to Cuba to deal with marauding Spaniards in the late 1800's. The Canadian Rough Riders were the heroes of the Spanish-



The Ti-cats take down the Rough Riders.

American War, imitated but never equalled by the squad of the same name led by Theo Roosevelt: a New York police commissioner quickly and deservedly relegated to the trash bin of history. Cashing in on the popularity of our boys in Cuba, Ottawa named its team the Rough Riders in 1898 and adopted the same red and black colours as the Canadian regiment. The Span-Am War still popular in 1912, the Regina Rugby Club decided to change their team colours to red and black as well. The switch-over was completed some twelve years later when the team name was also changed, though Regina cleverly distinguished themselves from the Ottawa team of the same name and colours by leaving a space between "Rough" and "Riders".

A year later in 1925, the Ottawa Roughriders, sensing a coming Spanish-American War backlash, became the Senators. The Senators lasted but two seasons before a hockey team of identical name and similar jersey was discovered; one which predated the football team by more than a couple decades. After briefly considering becoming the Ottawa Napoleon the Thirds, in an effort to cash in on rampant nostalgia for the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), Ottawa instead reverted to the Roughriders. In 1996 the CFL, weary of the fiscally inept Ottawa

team, revoked the Roughriders' membership and would likely have run then-owner, the clueless Horn Chen, out of town on a rail had he actually spent enough time in the city for a suitably angry mob to be gathered.

Today, a deal to bring Ottawa back into the CFL under the ownership of a group headed by Lacrosse Impresario Bill Waters is all but completed. One detail that remains unresolved is the naming of the re-established Ottawa team. History buffs and many CFL fans, understandably disgusted at the prospect of a CFL that would continue to field nearly ten

teams, all with different names, are in favour of the return of the Ottawa Roughriders. Standing in the way however, is the aforementioned, and possibly not entirely clueless, Horn Chen. Amazingly, and counter to all common sense, the CFL did not retain ownership of the name "Roughriders" when they disbanded the team. Horn Chen, incomparable sore loser and current owner of the "Roughriders" name, is apparently asking for several hundred thousand dollars for the rights to use the name. Bill Waters and company are not likely to dish out so much extra cash after having to raise ten million dollars for the Ottawa franchise - this in a league which has seen several teams bought and sold for an even dollar.

The time is right for a return to the glory days of Canadian football - a time when feral cat calls reverberated through this large and empty land. With the courage, bravery and valour of our Span-Am War heroes safeguarded by the green and white Saskatchewan Rough Riders, we must turn our attention to preserving another Canadian icon, one which has all but disappeared from our collective memories.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Let's hear it for your Ottawa Tigers!

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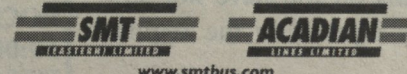
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