

# Behind the scenes of the 96th Grey Cup

*Fans go all out for the top game of the year in Canadian football*

**By Jared Book**  
*Special to CUP*

MONTREAL (CUP) – I am naïve. When I first get to Olympic Stadium on Tuesday afternoon to pick up my media accreditation, I think it is just another CFL game. But sometime between seeing a human torch dressed in Saskatchewan Roughriders green and being overwhelmed with crazed CFL fans at a downtown Montreal hotel, I realize this isn't just a CFL game; It's the Canadian Super Bowl.

Now, that may even be slighting the Grey Cup. If you weren't in downtown Montreal at any point this week, shame on you. Fans from all over Canada took part in the festivities and I don't think I've ever seen as many cowboy hats as I did this week.

But, part of the fun is the ability to go behind the scenes with the Grey Cup events. It wasn't without a hitch – I suspect nothing is when so much is involved, but allow me to give you the highlights of a behind-the-scenes tour.

The week starts Tuesday when I picked up my media pass. I have to get my picture taken, and the woman behind the counter tells everyone theirs is "a nice picture." However, that trend stops when she hands me my pass. Perhaps that's because I look like I belong on A&E's True Crime Stories as a flight at-

tendant abductor between 1973 and 1977.

[SUB] Thursday: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Oh My!

On Thursday morning the Alouettes hold their media breakfast. It's at a posh hotel, and it is not continental. Two positives. This is my first day to do one-on-one interviews and I speak to several players and coaches before going to get food. This is a fatal mistake. Not only have the offensive linemen eaten, they have made more than one trip. This means my plate is lacking French toast and potatoes.

After the Alouettes breakfast, comes the Stampeders lunch. And, honestly, if the Grey Cup came down to the food, the Als would win in a landslide. Stampeder wide receiver Nik Lewis goes off about how the spread isn't a buffet, but it's a "Subway." The spread of weird sandwiches looks good, but tastes half as good.

It is also Thursday afternoon when I realize the actual Grey Cup is actually a big deal. The trophy is sitting next to the podium, and I have a quick look. It's a lot like the Stanley Cup in that every player's name is engraved.

Thursday night is the Gibson's Finest CFL Player Awards, hosted by bilingual comic Christopher Hall. Let's just say he's horrible, and that may be an understatement.

His first joke is: "If you're



A human torch at the Grey Cup. Photo: Alexei Anikine/CUP

from out of town and don't speak French, don't worry. All you have to say is: 'I'm sorry I only speak English. But I French very well.'" His next line knocks curling, which doesn't take into account the number of fans from Saskatchewan who almost boo him off stage. Alouettes president Larry Smith has to apologize when he takes the stage a little later.

[SUB] Sunday: game day

I arrive at Olympic Stadium a little before 2:00 p.m., four hours before kickoff and one hour before the doors open.

The press box is open, which means I can see and hear as if I am actually in the stadium. The boos and cheers are deafening from

the 66,308 fans.

At halftime, the second food crisis of the week happens. There are a lot of hungry journalists and a shortage of hot dogs. This forces most media members to miss the halftime show. Not that the journalists mind. Not many adults enjoy Theory of a Deadman, Suzie McNeil, and Andrée Watters.

Once the game is over, it's time to talk to the winning and losing teams.

My first stop is the Alouettes' dressing room, which is quiet except for the players being interviewed. Anthony Calvillo is my first interview, followed by Bryan Chiu, who is the most emotional, and then on to Anwar Stewart.

Then I move on to the field to talk to the winning Stampeders. The Stamps are much happier. In the dressing room, I'm shocked to see the celebrations. I've seen it on TV, but to be here is surreal.

There are players with their families and friends smoking victory cigars. There are puddles of champagne, and people just soaking it all in. I feel the ashes of a victory cigar go down my neck. It hurts a little bit.

It get to a point where I just want to stay in this room, and observe. I can't imagine what it would feel like to have won the trophy. I wouldn't want to imagine what it would be like to be in the other dressing room.