

Bill Rea ? Argos!

I can't, at this point, explain it.

Almost in spite of myself, I got interested.

The Toronto Argonauts got into the Grey Cup game, and after some 30 years of indifference, I suddenly found myself actually caring about it all.

It had been about 30 years since I watched an entire Canadian Football League (CFL) game. There was a time I wouldn't have missed a match as long as the Argos were playing. But those were the days of my youth, and much has changed in the years that have passed. There was a time when I lost all interest in professional sports. But my roots, born and raised in Toronto, had not completely disconnected me from such things as the Leafs and Argos. The Blue Jays are a little different. They came into being in my last year of high school, and while I feel a certain civic pride in their accomplishments over the years (they have won exactly the same number of World Series championships as the New York Mets and the Cleveland Indians), they stir up no ?little kid? memories. I am part of that dwindling local crowd who has vivid memories of the Leafs actually hoisting the Stanley Cup. I should have seen a couple more such scenes in the intervening years. I am at that point where I hope I might see one more before I die.

I was raised by parents who had season tickets to the Argo games, and they had great seats.

Remember the old CNE Stadium (there are some who in time referred to it as ?the mistake by the lake.?) The covered stands were on the north side of the field, and the sections were listed alphabetically, and my folks seats were right at the top, directly under the K, which also happened to be at midfield. My folks went to all the games. I was able to get to maybe one or two matches every season.

But this was during the years when the Argos weren't doing much. The season was considered successful if the Double Blue made it to the playoffs.

Only once, during my youthful days, did they make it to the Grey Cup. It was actually an exciting game that the Argos nearly won. Dick Thornton intercepted a pass late in the game and almost scored when he ran it back. But Leon McQuay fumbled the ball and ruined the day for Toronto fans. They lost to Calgary, incidentally, and the thought that I might have to watch history repeat itself occurred to me a few times as game time approached.

There was a time when I thought I would never see my team win the championship. Indeed, I was well into my 20s before I saw it for the first time. In the years that have followed, I have seen the Boatmen win all the marbles a couple of times, and chances are pretty good it will happen couple more times while I'm still alive and kicking.

I tuned into the fourth quarter of the Eastern Final last Sunday. I started watching the action with the Argos seeming to have things well in hand, and watched as they almost blew it. I wasn't sure if I was a jinx, or if that ?Argo bounce? that all fans of the Double Blue know only so well was still in effect. I only saw the last quarter, but I was in the game. My wife will be happy to confirm that. Now reflect on the words you have read, because just about all of them were written long before Sunday's game; written with a heart full of hope, and aware of the possibility of disappointment. Is there any other reason for watching sports.

Using the common sense I like to think I was born with, I bothered little with the pre-game hype. The fact is Beth had things for me to do around the house. But as the game was about to start, I was concerned about the snow. Beth was even more concerned than I. My response when she expressed such matters was to loudly hum the first three notes of O Canada.

?Conditions are perfect for a Canadian classic,? said the TV commentator.

Incidentally, I never thought our National Anthem would work when accompanied by guitar, but it certainly did Sunday.

At half time, I was not rejoicing, but I was not in despair either. The Argos had missed a convert, but I have seen worse. Besides, These games go for 60 minutes for a reason.

It is part of reality that championship games can often be rather boring affairs, with one team blowing the other out of the stadium. Thankfully, such was not the case Sunday. The game held the interest of all who were watching right until the last minute. It was worth the time.

Throughout my life, I have heard and read of people making comparisons between the CFL and the NFL in the States. It is true that a lot of American players come north of the boarder because they can't make the team in their own country. But that's okay, because as was demonstrated Sunday, they do contribute to making an entertaining product. And it's a different product.

I have always liked the fact that the Canadian field is a lot bigger, and there are more players on the field. Three downs versus four? That can be debated forever. At least in the Canadian game, the kickers have a bit more to do.

When I was a kid, I would read the occasional story predicting that the CFL only had a couple of years left. It would eventually be absorbed by the NFL, or it would simply die out from lack of interest. Well, it's still around, and I think it's going to stay for a while.

Indeed, during some of the pre-game hype that I did watch, I heard mention of a team starting up in Halifax. I wonder why that hasn't happened already

