

Historica Canada Education Portal

The Frozen Gridiron

Overview

This lesson plan is based around several Footprints videos: Normie Kwong, Russ Jackson, Ron Lancaster and Angelo Mosca. Watch the minutes with your students prior to conducting the activities.

The first Grey Cup game was played on a cold, blustery day in December 1909. The 1950 Grey Cup - The Mud Bowl - was such a mess that at one point a referee mistakenly thought a Winnipeg player was drowning in a puddle. Toronto's Exhibition Stadium was host to the 1962 Fog Bowl, a Grey Cup game that lasted two days. Before the modern era of artificial turf, domed stadiums and end zone antics, these football players defined the game when it was celebrated not as a lesser northern cousin, but as a distinctly Canadian creation.

Aims

To increase student awareness of the development of football in Canada; to increase student recognition of key players who dominated the field; to examine their accomplishments in their historical context; to explore how Canadian football became specific to the nation over the course of the twentieth century; to critically investigate the relationship between politics and sport; and, to explore Canadian unease with how the United States has influenced Canadian football.

Background

Three events transpired in 1909 that highlighted Canadian efforts to define our identity in the midst of our nation's frigid environment.

The Canadian edition of *Collier's Weekly* announced Mrs. Percy E. Powell McCulloch as the winner of a competition to find a translation of "O Canada" that would be acceptable in English. Joseph-Elzéar Bernier, captain of the government steamship *Arctic*, placed a metal plaque at Parry Rock claiming Canadian sovereignty over the entire Arctic Archipelago. And, the Governor-General of Canada, Lord Albert Henry Earl Grey, donated a trophy to be awarded to the team winning the Senior Amateur Football Championship of Canada, better recognized now as the Grey Cup.

Since these early days, Canada and the trophy have survived two world wars, thefts, bitter East-West rivalries, and substantial expenditures of money. Canadian football is intimately linked to the country's geography and this has been central to the way our game has stood apart from the version played south of the border.

In the mid nineteenth century, Chinese immigration to Canada was tolerated as a means of securing a useful source of cheap labour. But in 1885, after the last spike was struck at the end of the CPR railway track, Chinese workers were increasingly thought to be taking jobs away from white workers. After the First World War, wartime industries closed and demobilized soldiers were looking for work. As a result, on 1 July 1923, amid a post-war recession, "Humiliation Day" inaugurated twenty-four years of the explicit exclusion of Chinese immigrants from Canada.

By the end of Second World War, the Chinese Exclusion Act was deeply out of step with the times. It was repealed in 1947 and Chinese Canadians, who had been disenfranchised since the First World War, regained the right to vote in federal elections.

Almost immediately following these changes, Normie Kwong joined the Canadian Football League in 1948 - the first Chinese Canadian to play in the league. Born Lim Kwong Yew in 1929 in Calgary, his parents had immigrated to Canada in the 1900s from Canton, China despite the \$500 head tax that Chinese immigrants were forced to pay at the time. Barred from owning land and property and from working certain jobs, Kwong and his family forged ahead against anti-Chinese sentiments in Alberta.

Even in the face of these obstacles, the athletic abilities of the 1.8 metre high, 77-kilogram fullback would prevail and Kwong joined the Calgary Stampeders, where he played in the first of his seven Grey Cup Finals. Ultimately, he would win four league titles over his celebrated career.

In 1951, Kwong moved on from Calgary in a trade with Edmonton. There, Kwong established himself as a stalwart runner with four consecutive 1,000-yard seasons. Combined with Johnny Bright, he gave the Eskimos a dynamic backfield, which would help Edmonton's football men to drink from the Grey Cup for three consecutive years between 1955 and 1958. In 1960, Kwong's last year in the CFL, the "China Clipper" added five more touchdowns to his career total to become the League's all-time touchdown leader - only one of thirty league records he held at the time.

After leaving football, Kwong returned to Calgary and served as the National Chairman of the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism from 1979 to 1980. From 1988 to 1991 he rejoined the

Calgary Stampede as General Manager and was a co-owner of the Calgary Flames in 1989 when the NHL franchise won their first Stanley Cup. Kwong's career on the frozen gridiron and then off the field has earned him the respect of fellow football players and the nation.

Distinguished from the American version, Canadian football typically made use of the whole field and avoided straight-ahead runs and drop back passing. On 1 December 1945, the Grey Cup game between the Toronto Argonauts and Winnipeg Blue Bombers was supposed to have changed the entire course of Canadian football. The Argos had built their team around Canadian players and the Canadian game. With a line-up of home-grown who based their attack on end runs, daring lateral option plays that employed both the run and pass, and players who were used on both the offence and defence, Toronto destroyed Winnipeg in a 35-0 victory.

Three years later on 27 November 1948, the Calgary Stampede, using a more American approach to the game, chalked up a 12-7 victory over the Ottawa Rough Riders to take the Grey Cup. That year, the Calgary Stampede boasted a perfect 12-0 record and Canadians christened a weeklong celebration, which has now evolved into the annual Grey Cup Week festivities. With such success, the beginning of one hallowed Canadian football tradition would also mark the beginning of the end for the distinctively Canadian game. As Toronto quarterback Joe "King" Krol, one of the CFL's greatest players commented at the time: "Canadian [football], a good game to play and a wonderful game to watch, is being ruined by Americanization."

If there were ever a role model deemed capable of stymieing the tide of American football imperialism, it was Canada's great Maple Leaf hope, Russ Jackson. Called the best and perhaps last good Canadian-born

quarterback to play in the CFL, Jackson played all twelve years of his unrivalled career with the Ottawa Rough Riders.

Born on 28 July 1936, the Hamilton, Ontario native excelled at football and basketball and won all-conference honours in both while at school. Dedicating himself to the pigskin, he was quickly drafted by the Rough Riders after a stellar career with the University of McMaster Marauders. Once in the League, he went on to define his own course and defy the prevailing winds of the CFL. For instance, Jackson negotiated his own professional football contract, which was unique in itself and unique for its stipulations. It included a \$4,500 base salary, a \$500 signing bonus, and, most interestingly, an open plane ticket back and forth from Ottawa to Toronto, which allowed Jackson to complete his teaching certificate at the Ontario College of Education.

Jackson's outstanding play as a quarterback defied the League's traditional practice of using an import American player for that pivotal position. According to Eddie MacCabe of the *Ottawa Citizen*, Jackson was the last of a vanishing breed - the Canadian Quarterback.

Perhaps fittingly, Jackson's most outstanding moment came in his final game in the League. Just prior to the 1969 Grey Cup, which would pit Jackson's Rough Riders against the Roughriders from Saskatchewan, the Hamilton-native announced his retirement. During the game, however, Jackson looked ready to play for years to come. Throughout the day, he eluded the Saskatchewan defence and ran or passed for first down after first down. By the end of the game, Jackson had tallied 254 yards passing, four touchdowns and no interceptions. He was the game's MVP and one of the greatest athletes for a generation of Canadians. Indicative of his commitments off the field, Jackson followed his swan song by continuing his career as a teacher. Eventually, he would become

a high school principal and only finally retired from the classroom in 1994.

In 1960, Jackson had beat out a young upstart for the Ottawa starting quarterback position. His challenger was the same Ron Lancaster who Jackson met on the field in his last game in 1969. Such a meeting was ironic if only because while Jackson is remembered as the great Canadian hope of the 1960s, Lancaster was the all-American boy who made it big in the CFL during the same decade.

The province of Saskatchewan, land of living skies, is the heartland of Canadian football. In the midst of her rivers, lakes and flowing wheat fields, throughout both the chill of autumn and the heat of summer, stands Taylor Field, home of the Saskatchewan Roughriders and still a landmark to the Canadian game. It was there that Lancaster, an American boy from Pennsylvania, patiently harvested a Canadian football career like no other.

Born on 14 October 1938 in Fairchance, Pennsylvania, Lancaster spent his college football career at Wittenberg University in Ohio in the late 1950s. The two-time all-Ohio Athletic Conference Player joined the CFL with the Ottawa Rough Riders in time for the 1960 football season. His introduction to Canadian football was difficult for the young American import. For the three seasons he played with Ottawa, Lancaster would compete with Russ Jackson, the All-Canadian kid, for the pivotal position on the field. The controversy that the two quarterbacks would endure divided a city of football fans.

With the coaching staff swaying back and forth between the two athletes, Lancaster was finally traded in 1963 prior to the regular season to help heal a divided team and city. At the time, Saskatchewan had appeared in nine Grey Cup games, with no victories to show for their efforts. This

would all change when the "Little General" from Pennsylvania arrived. Indeed, in his first season in Saskatchewan, Lancaster led the Roughriders to a 29-14 victory over his former team. This success would be followed by years of success, both on the field and off.

Lancaster was a master craftsman and tactician of the game who patiently reaped records. When he retired at the age of 41, he had thrown more touchdown passes, more completions, and suffered more interceptions than anyone else in CFL history. He had also passed for more yardage than any passer in professional football history.

Lancaster took over as Saskatchewan coach immediately after his last season in 1978, but this move would also take the heart out of the team. Lancaster was the first Roughrider coach in 16 years who did not have Ron Lancaster as quarterback. Not surprisingly, after finishing 2-14 in consecutive seasons, Lancaster left his coaching duties.

In the 1980s, he reappeared as CBC's colour commentator for CFL TV broadcasts. But his television days were numbered; when he was asked to give up his CBC microphone for a coaching headset, the lure of returning to the field proved irresistible. As a result, in 1991, Lancaster was back pacing the sidelines, this time for the Edmonton Eskimos. In seven seasons with Edmonton, Lancaster's teams appeared in two Grey Cups, winning one in 1993 over the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. In 1998, Lancaster assumed command of the Hamilton Tiger Cats and led them to a 12-5-1 record. One year later, Coach Lancaster would lead the same Tiger Cats team to Grey Cup victory.

Even with all his successes following his years with the Saskatchewan Roughriders, Regina's Taylor Field still remains home to the Lancaster legend.

Remembering past Grey Cups is a study in the unique environment and play of Canadian football. Most often held on an autumn or winter day in November, the Grey Cup is a competition between two teams *and* the weather. Consider the Mud Bowl at Varsity Stadium in Toronto. For a week before the 25 November 1950 showdown between the Toronto Argonauts and the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, the field was loaded down with snow. Organizers snowplowed the unfrozen ground and on game day the two teams proceeded to create a muddy mess. Or perhaps the Fog Bowl of 1 *and* 2 December 1962 provides evidence of nature's third hand in the Grey Cup. Before more than 32,000 fans at Toronto's Exhibition Stadium, the game included plenty of thrills, which few could actually see. So bad were the conditions that by the fourth quarter, the fog claimed victory and the game was forced to resume under clear skies the next day. Playing the final nine minutes and 29 seconds, Winnipeg would eke out a squeaker, winning 28-27 over Hamilton to capture their fourth Grey Cup in five years.

If the environment has reaped havoc on Grey Cup day, it shouldn't surprise us that players have created their own special kind of havoc over the history of the Grey Cup. In November of 1963, Hamilton was returning to the final for a showdown with the BC Lions, who were making their first trip to the Grey Cup. The Lions were led by their star runningback Willie Fleming whose day would end in untimely fashion in the second quarter under less than normal circumstances. Carrying the ball up the sidelines, Fleming was "kind of" tackled by Hamilton's Gene Ceppetelli. But because he had not gone down and because the whistle had not blown, Angelo "King Kong" Mosca of the Tiger Cats also got in on the tackle. Mosca's devastating blow (and many argue, late hit) crippled Fleming and he was forced to leave the game. Without their star threat, the Lions could not compete and Hamilton won the Cup in a 21-10

victory.

Now, more than four decades since Mosca's suspect hit, it's possible to suggest that his actions and the accomplishments of other unique athletes throughout league history have come to define the successes of Canadian football. Since the 1980s, the league has been challenged to stay competitive in the ever-evolving world of professional sports. Few argue with the fact that the CFL puts on a great game; the problem is how to profile and market this game at a level and with an impact that speaks to Canadian audiences. Each year, the Grey Cup final continues to attract huge audience numbers, even if regular season games struggle to attract hometown crowds and local media attention. No doubt the league will continue and will struggle against even if faced with a changing audience and fickle environments, and challenged by our love/hate relationship with pigskin celebrations held south of the border. Through it all, players will continue to compete and put on a show, one hopes with memories in mind of athletes like Normie Kwong, Russ Jackson, Ron Lancaster, and Angelo Mosca who played before them.

Activities

1. Dream Team Deck

In groups of 2-3, students are to construct a Canadian football "dream team" that includes players from each of the decades in which the Grey Cup has been awarded. As well, students are to select one quarterback and one coach (from any decade) to round out the roster. Therefore, there will be twelve players and one coach for each group. On football cards, students are to list the statistics of each member of their dream team, explaining why the specific player is included. Finally, students

should provide an illustration depicting the chosen player/coach in the uniform of their era. The final product is a deck of twelve cards.

2. Maritime football

The CFL spans from Vancouver in the west to Montréal in the east, but there it ends. Students are to pitch the creation of a new team to the Canadian Football League office that is located east of Montréal. In groups of two to three, students are to produce a package that includes the following:

- A 100-word explanation about why their chosen city deserves a team.
- Illustrations depicting the emblem of the new team, remembering to consider the historical and/or cultural context of the city.
- A location where the new team will play host to games.
- Fictional quotations of 50-100 words from locals extolling the city and the CFL. Alternatively, students could provide video footage of such personal accounts.

3. Collecting the game's past.

In February of 1999, Canadian Todd McFarlane, creator of the comic book *Spawn*, revealed he was the anonymous bidder who paid \$4.5 million for slugger Mark McGwire's 70th home run ball. McGwire is no longer the homerun king, but the famous purchase highlights the ends to which collectors will go to capture and possess a moment of sports history. Students are to become collectors of Canadian football memorabilia.

Students should select ten objects that represent pivotal moments in the history of the game. Each object should be accompanied by a brief description and an explanation of why it is specifically important to the game.

4. Political muscle

On 30 May 1974, Conservative Party Leader Robert Stanfield was in the midst of an election campaign to unseat the Liberal minority of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Stanfield's campaign plane touched down for refuelling in North Bay, Ontario. When Stanfield doffed his suit jacket to join a spontaneous game of catch, Doug Ball, a Canadian Press photographer, filled a roll of film with the usual campaign images. One photograph however, turned out to be the defining photo of Robert Stanfield's career in federal politics; shown awkwardly knock-kneed, with hands crossed and a grimacing face as the football slipped between his knotted fingers, Stanfield would be forever remembered as a bit of a bumbling nice guy. The contrast to the dashing, photogenic figure of Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau could not have been starker. It was a political fumble by a man many consider the greatest Prime Minister Canada never had. Political pundits argue over whether the photograph cost the Conservatives the election, but there is little doubt that the image resonates because of our association of political leadership with athletics.

Indeed, Trudeau was always a strong supporter of the CFL and of the Grey Cup game. In 1968, for instance, he practiced his placekicking for weeks and showed up for the ceremonial kickoff wearing a kicking shoe. In the end, he would set a ceremonial kickoff distance record. During his two terms as Canadian Prime Minister, he presented the Grey Cup to the champions on seven occasions.

Students are to research a moment in Canadian history when politicians have used sport to enhance their political prospects. In a 250-word article for a newspaper from the era in which the event occurred, students are to argue whether the politician was genuine and successful. That is, does the politician honestly have links to the sport, or is he or she using it disingenuously and without much knowledge or appreciation? Did the association enhance or detract from the politician's popularity? The article should consider the political and sporting context of their chosen event.

5. Early Days of Canadian Football

On 4 December 1909, a typically cold blustery day, before an audience of only 3,807, the first Grey Cup game was played at Rosedale Field in Toronto. The University of Toronto played their cross-town rivals, the Parkdale Canoe Club, for the new trophy donated by the Governor General, Earl Grey. But whereas the modern fan would recognise the ultimate prize of Canadian football in 1909, he or she would not easily have recognised the game being played on the field. More like the English sports of rugby and soccer, the centre scrimmage put the ball in play by heeling it back with the foot. There were also five-minute penalties for rough play and dribbling the ball was permitted but the forward pass was forbidden.

Hugh Gall, who could kick with either foot, scored one touchdown and eight singles for the University of Toronto Blues in the first Grey Cup game. Less than a week later, on Saturday 11 December, following an invitation from the New York Herald newspaper, Hamilton Tigers and Ottawa Rough Riders played an exhibition game of Canadian football in New York City at Van Cortland Park. The Tigers won 11-6 before 15,000 fans.

Students are to write a commentary about the game between the Tigers and Rough Riders for the *New York Herald*. In an article of 250-words, students should highlight the specifics of the game as played by the two Canadian teams. How does it differ from the game as practiced in the United States? What are the similarities and differences from other sports such as rugby and soccer? The piece should also include an argument for or against the modification of the Canadian game.

Resources

[Russ Jackson - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Norman Kwong - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Ronald Lancaster - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Angelo Mosca](#)

[Footprint - Russ Jackson](#)

[Footprint - Angelo Mosca](#)

[Footprint - Ron Lancaster](#)

[Footprint - Norman Kwong](#)

[Canadian Football League - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Grey Cup - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Fog Bowl - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Canadian Football Hall of Fame - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

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