

CFL POWER RANKINGS



1. Lions
Now that Lions' QB is second all-time behind Sam (The Rifle) Etcheverry in consecutive games with a TD pass (22), we might call him Travis (The Rocket Launcher) Lulay.



2. Argonauts
Before last Saturday's game, Wally Buono suggested the Argos "are as good a team as we'll play at this point of the season." They came within five points of a win at BC Place.



3. Stampeders
Like a flying chuckwagon at the Calgary Stampede, the Stamps are picking up speed and headed to a much-anticipated showdown against the Lions at BC Place on Oct. 6.



4. Alouettes
The Als have lost RB Brandon Whitaker for the season with a devastating knee injury and will have to go forward without the CFL's best all-purpose back.



5. Roughriders
It was a very tall order for Drew Willy to defeat Anthony Calvillo in his first CFL start, but Rider backup QB statistically was not very far off in closer-than-anticipated loss in Montreal.



6. Tiger-Cats
Good week for the Ticats' coaching staff, which not only concocted a huge win over Edmonton but chased down a thief vandalizing a car outside Ivor Wynne Stadium.



7. Eskimos
After two near misses against the Stampeders, the Esks came crashing down in Steeltown, a 43-point loss that proved they are not a contender.



8. Blue Bombers
Paul LaPolice was fired after his team extended the Lions to the limit, but the disastrous regime of Joe Mack/Tim Burke makes LaPo's exit look even worse.

Mike Beamish, Vancouver Sun

CANADIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Hail Mary finds its target

BCIT grad drew inspiration from late Steve Sabol en route to Esks' documentary

MIKE BEAMISH
VANCOUVER SUN

As a college fullback at tiny Colorado College, self-promoting Steve (Sudden Death) Sabol invented his own nickname and perpetrated the notion that he was slightly less talented than the great National Football League running backs of his era.

Ironically, claimed by brain cancer this week, Sabol's death did not come suddenly. At age 69, however, he left behind a legacy — as a cameraman, producer, writer, editor, director, cinematographer and president of NFL Films — that exceeded the mythmaking exploits of Jim Brown, Gale Sayers or Cookie Gilchrist.

The Sabol vision — turning the violence of football into cinematic art, through tight close-ups and slow-motion photography, backed by Wagnerian music and voice-of-doom narration — lives on, 50 years later in football reality series such as the NFL's *Hard Knocks*, TSN's *The Extra Yard* (last year's inside look at the Toronto Argonauts) and Anaid Productions of Vancouver's *Hail Mary* on Citytv.

"Definitely, I drew my inspiration from Steve Sabol and NFL Films," says Jeff Kinnon, a 36-year-old product of the North Shore's Gordon Sturtridge Football League, a graduate of BCIT's broadcast journalism program and the producer/director/writer of *Hail Mary*. The second installment airs Saturday at 10 p.m., a couple of hours after the Lions-Eskimos' game at Commonwealth Stadium.

"The music, the narration, the conversations on the sidelines ... NFL Films gives us a glimpse, an inside look at the game that makes for great TV watching. Every sports league is still struggling to find a comfort zone when it comes to documentaries. The CFL is still struggling. But we were looking at a way to show the human side of football that's true to both players and coaches, without getting caught up in the Xs and Os."

Despite Kinnon's West Coast



The late Steve Sabol turned the violence of football into cinematic art. He inspired Jeff Kinnon, whose *Hail Mary* airs Saturday at 10 p.m.

upbringing — he went to the same high school as Lions' guard Dean Valli, Windsor, in North Vancouver — *Hail Mary* is an 11-part documentary series about the Edmonton Eskimos, from the perspective of the young men, and their families, who place their hopes and dreams on a football career in a place many find difficult to locate on a map.

Kinnon pitched the project to Anaid Productions in January, intrigued to do a series on "cattle calls" — the open tryout camps that CFL teams run throughout the U.S. every year. He approached the Eskimos first, and president Len Rhodes was on board with it. Kinnon looked no further.

Although the series features Paul Jones — the "larger-than-life" Eskimos assistant GM from Elaine, Ark., and his keen eye keen for undiscovered football talent — it could just as

easily be about Wally Buono, Bob O'Billovich or Jim Popp or any CFL executive or team that beats the bushes for that one gem in a 1,000 — a Travis Lulay or a Fred Stamps, players uniquely suited to the Canadian game.

"NFL fans in Canada like to put the CFL down," Kinnon said. "But it takes a different kind of athlete, not a loser athlete, and probably a more conditioned athlete. How quickly rookies need to adjust, and how quickly they appreciate the requirements of the Canadian game ... this is not a second-place medal for them."

Episode 2, which airs Saturday, takes place in Atlanta, where 160 candidates show up for an open tryout, "most without a chance to make it in this lifetime, or any other lifetime," quips Eskimos' GM Eric Tillman. Among them is Eldra Buckley, a former NFL running back with the Chargers,

Eagles and Detroit Lions, who has seriously underestimated what it takes to play pro football in Canada. The episode follows his growing frustrations as the dream of getting a training camp invite literally slips through his fingers.

Then there's Chris D'Andrea, a running back from Montclair State who led all Division III rushers in his senior year. His desperation for a pro career is exceeded only by that of his parents and siblings. His mom sacrifices a savings fund for new living room furniture on plane tickets to Atlanta, only to see the tryout end in tears.

"Football is just the wallpaper, a setting," Kinnon explained. "Hail Mary is not just a football story, analyzing the game, the strategies and the people who play it. That's been done to death. It's about achieving a dream, or not achieving a dream, taking a chance and

striving for something's that's hard to do, that not a lot of people can do. The challenge is, can you tell the story of the guys who got there?"

Reality shows on food-deprived desert islands, dance studios, fat camps and apprenticing with The Donald seem much too contrived — and this is where *Hail Mary* scores a major with CFL fans and those with only a passing interest in the game.

Joe Burnett, Joe Gibbs, Simoni Lawrence, Orrin Thompson, Ryan King — they're just random names and numbers to most CFL fans. But *Hail Mary* invests the viewer with an emotional connection to the players and, just as importantly, connects us to the loved ones back home who feel their joy, pain and sorrow, as if they were their own.

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ESKIMOS

McKnight puts best foot forward in battle for job

Former Vancouver College kicker faces a fight for full-time work against Edmonton's incumbent

MIKE BEAMISH
VANCOUVER SUN

Brody McKnight is still waiting for his Canadian Football League career to get off the ground.

Actually, it did, but ever so slightly last Saturday at Ivor Wynne Stadium in Hamilton.

The 22-year-old rookie kicker of the Edmonton Eskimos, by way of the Montana Grizzlies and Vancouver College Fighting Irish, had his first CFL field goal attempt not only blocked but returned 52 yards for a touchdown by the Tiger-Cats in a 51-8 mauling of the Eskimos.

McKnight was asked to convert his kick from 48 yards out, into a stiff wind, and one might accuse the Eskimos of putting him into a near-impossible situation and hanging him out to dry.

Of course, McKnight is not going to say that. He's new in town, having been traded to the Eskimos this month from the Montreal Alouettes, who extracted a high price from Edmonton GM Eric Tillman to get him. The Esks gave up and first- and fourth-round draft

picks, plus backup Derek Schiavone in the deal.

Unlike the B.C. Lions, who play the Eskimos Saturday afternoon at Commonwealth Stadium, the Edmonton kicking situation is in a state of flux, as is much of the team.

The Eskimos' other kicker, Grant Shaw — obtained from Toronto in the one-sided Ricky Ray trade — had his confidence shaken with two final-play field goal attempts against the Calgary Stampeders that didn't make it. It couldn't have helped that nobody on the coaching staff told Shaw he wasn't up when he went to join the field-goal unit in Hamilton, only to see that McKnight was preparing for his first attempt.

This week, head coach Kavis Reed said he would let practice decide which player will be his No. 1 kicker against the Lions, and with the kickoff still more two days away, McKnight has no idea if he'll be the man.

"I'm not the coach. I can't comment on that," McKnight said Wednesday, in a telephone interview. "I'm just going to come out, kick footballs and focus on that. We have a tough



Brody McKnight, 22, is battling for the Eskimos kicking job.

group of guys on this team, and no doubt they can overcome anything. I'm a tough cat myself. I've learned to overcome adversity. To be honest with you, I'm not even thinking about last week. I'm concentrating on this week, and the present, for now."

McKnight set a Montana school record with six field goals in a game last season in his senior year with the Grizzlies and, although he wasn't drafted by an NFL team, he was

confident he still could make it. In 2010, for instance, 19 of the 32 kickers on the NFL's opening weekend got there as undrafted free agents.

McKnight went to two NFL mini-camps — with the New York Jets and Arizona Cardinals — and the fact neither team kept him doesn't seem to have shaken his belief in himself.

How did he do? "Great. I did real well," he said. "I hit 13 of 15 (field-goal attempts) with the Jets, my longest kick from 54 yards. I did real well in Arizona, too."

When neither NFL team signed him, however, McKnight left for the Montreal Alouettes — the team that made him a first-round pick in 2011 — and he bided his time behind No. 1 kicker Sean Whyte, a former Lion, before the Edmonton trade placed him in Eskimo garb.

Growing up, McKnight's kicking icons were Adam Vinatieri and Lui Passaglia, "because they made so many kicks under pressure." But he expresses great respect for "Mr. McCallum," the 42-year-old Lions kicker otherwise known to

his contemporaries as Paul. When he was about to join the Alouettes, McKnight phoned McCallum for advice on what to expect.

McCallum told him there'd be days like the one he experienced in his CFL debut. Just deal with it and move on.

"For his sake, I hope he is mentally tough, because you have to be in this position," McCallum said. "But whether he can deal with adversity at this level, I guess we're going to find out. I don't think there's anything wrong with the two of them (Shaw and McKnight) battling it out this week. 'Let the best man win.' This game is about being productive and getting Ws (wins). If somebody comes in here and beats me out, well, I guess he's better than me and I'm out of a job."

For kickers, the mental side is "more than half of it," McCallum adds. If you don't have the constitution for it, it doesn't matter how far you can kick it — even from a length as prodigious as 54 yards.

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CFL PICKS

Sun reporter Mike Beamish offers his Week 13 predictions:

FRIDAY

Hamilton at Winnipeg

5 p.m., TSN

The resiliency of Winnipeg sports fans continues to amaze. Despite their team's 2-9 record, and the most recent crushing defeat — 44-3 to the Stampeders — Blue Bomber fans continue to troop to the ticket window. The team has played to 98 per cent capacity at a stadium slated for demolition, much as the football team will be when all is said and done at the end of the 2012 season. Bombers will be close to a sell-out again Friday, in an epic battle between 2-9 and 4-7 teams to see which is truly the CFL's worst. Only a fool would bet on the Bombers, you say? With Buck Pierce back following an eight-game absence, it's purely a sentimental choice.

Pick: Blue Bombers

SATURDAY

B.C. at Edmonton

4:30 p.m., TSN

Last Saturday's 28-23 win over Toronto was much too close in the eyes of many Lions fans, who watched their team release its grip on Argo throats after B.C. had taken a 28-16 fourth-quarter lead. Still, good teams find a way, and the Lions' defence did. After their 43-point loss in Hamilton, the Eskimos have hired David Kelly as an offensive adviser. Kelly has coached Terrell Owens and Hines Ward in his career. Wonder if those superannuated NFL receivers would be interested in playing in Canada? Eskimos have the second-worst offence in the CFL.

Pick: Lions

SUNDAY

Toronto at Montreal

10 a.m., TSN

The Argos and Lions have only two scheduled games this season. But after watching the Double Blue extend the hosts at BC Place last Saturday, we're left to wonder if Braley Bowl III might be in the offing for Nov. 25, at the Grey Cup in Toronto? The Argos have the best road record and the best division record (4-1) in the East. Their Cup-worthiness certainly will get a boost with a win Sunday in Montreal, where the Alouettes looked less than impressive a week earlier with second-half struggles in a 28-17 win over Saskatchewan. And it was a costly victory. Both RB Brandon Whitaker and receiver Brian Bratton went down with knee injuries that will test the Alouettes' depth.

Pick: Argonauts

Calgary at Saskatchewan

1 p.m., TSN

Esteemed, award-winning columnist George Johnson of the Calgary Herald wrote a perfect piece this week on Kevin Glenn, the understated Stampeders quarterback whose name should be thrown into consideration for most outstanding player, given what he's accomplished after a knee injury to presumptive starter Drew Tate. Not to put Tate in the same league yet. But imagine the Lions without Travis Lulay; the Argos without Ricky Ray; Glenn has put the Stampeders in position whereby they're one key injury away from challenging the Lions for domination in the West. Rookie backup Drew Willy looked capable four days ago against Montreal, but the Roughriders really need a healthy Darian Durant (hip flexor issues) to contend this week.

Pick: Stampeders

Last Week: 4-0

Season: 27-17