

The 1962 Grey Cup: Played in a Fog

by Jack Ziegler

Most pro football games take 3 to 3 1/2 hours to complete. However, when the Winnipeg Blue Bombers met the Hamilton Tiger-Cats for the Grey Cup Championship in 1962 the game took 25 hours because of fog delay. Or as Bobby Kuntz of the Ti-Cats put it: "I waited seven years to play in a Grey Cup game and then I get two in two days."

The Grey Cup game was scheduled for 1 p.m. on December 1, 1962 in Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition stadium. As early as 30 November, league and club officials were concerned about the heavy fog in Toronto. Joseph Sheehan of the New York Times reported that "It was so foggy ...in downtown Toronto that until noon it was impossible to see across even a narrow street."

Yet by 11:30 a.m. on game day things seemed to be going well. While there was heavy fog over Lake Ontario, weather at CNE stadium was delightful with the temperature in the fifties and sunny skies. But by 1 p.m. kickoff time the field was covered with haze as prevailing winds began to move the fog in from the lake. By the end of the first quarter there were dense patches of fog on the field that eventually became a solid mass. From the stands and the press box, fans and reporters could only see halfway across the 65 yard wide field. Dramatic plays were signaled by voices in the mist on the opposite side of the field though sideline ground television cameras could pick up action unseen by higher-up cameras, spectators and reporters. Players on the field, ironically, had little complaint about playing conditions and there were few fumbles or dropped passes.

Hamilton was a substantial favorite over the Western Conference champion Blue Bombers. Toronto bookmakers made the Ti-Cats an 8 point favorite over the injury-ridden westerners. The Toronto Globe and Mail sports staff (probably the best in the country) unanimously picked the Ti-Cats by 12 to 21 points over Winnipeg. The Blue Bombers were missing two starters, linebacker Gar Warren and fullback Roger Hagberg, while four others – defensive end Herb Gray, linebackers Jack Delveaux and Dave Burkholder, and fullback Charley Shepard – were questionable.

To add a further twist to this bizarre encounter, head coaches Bud Grant (Winnipeg) and Jim Trimble (Hamilton) were personal rivals. The laconic Grant had starred at end for Trimble with the NFL Eagles in 1952, catching 56 passes for 997 yards and 7 touchdowns. Trimble had also belittled the defending Grey Cup Blue Bombers, calling their appearance in the Grey Cup a fluke due to a lucky win over the Calgary Stampeders in the Western finals. Trimble promised to "whomp the hell" out of Winnipeg, a boast the Blue Bombers took deep exception to.

The Hamilton Tiger-Cats were led by quarterback Joe Zuger, a rookie from Arizona State who in 1962 had completed 60% of his passes for 15 touchdowns. Kenny Ploen, Iowa's quarterback in their 1957 Rose Bowl win, was the scheduled starter for Winnipeg. Ploen had done even better in 1962, completing 66% of his passes and tossing 17 majors. However, Grant would need Ploen to double as a defensive back during the game and so Ploen alternated with second-string Hal Leydard as signal caller.

The first quarter began in a relatively quiet way with Ti-Cat halfback Garney Henley's 74 yard touchdown gallop being the only scoring. But Don Sutherin, the Hamilton placekicker, missed a routine convert, to make the score 6-0.

The second quarter proved more explosive, breaking the old Grey Cup record of 4 touchdowns in one quarter. Halfback Leo Lewis scored on a 6 yard run to cap a 102 yard Blue Bomber drive to make it 7-6, 'Peg, with Gerry James' conversion. Minutes later, Lewis attacked via the air, throwing a 16 yard option pass on a rollout to Charlie Shepherd. With James' convert it was 14-6, Winnipeg. The Ti-Cats came roaring back, scoring two majors in a row.

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First, a one yard plunge by Bobby Kuntz and Sutherin's extra point made it 14-13 Winnipeg. When the Blue Bombers fumbled on their 18, the Ti-Cats capitalized, sending Henley for his second score of the day on an 18 yard reverse. But, horrors of horrors, Sutherin missed another "automatic" extra point and the score stood at 19-14, Hamilton. Winnipeg racked up the fifth touchdown of the quarter on an exciting hook-and-ladder play. Journeyman quarterback Hal Ledyard threw a pass to end Farrel Furston who lateraled to trailer Leo Lewis for a 36 yard touchdown score. With James' convert, the Blue Bombers pulled ahead 21-19 at halftime.

With no lights in CNE stadium and the fog rolling in, CFL commissioner G. Sidney Halter had halftime shortened from 25 to 15 minutes. Playing conditions continued deteriorating as Hamilton's Joe Zuger, not having his best day (he would go 8 for 23), managed to throw his only touchdown pass, a 36 yard strike to end Dave Viti. Sutherin's convert made it 26-21, Ti-Cats. Winnipeg's Leo Lewis, playing an excellent game, largely negated Hamilton's score by returning the subsequent kickoff 60 yards to Hamilton's 33. A few plays later Shepherd's four yard surge and James' convert made it 28-26, Blue Bombers. Third quarter scoring was completed on a wide field goal attempt by Sutherin that Winnipeg elected to keep in their end zone for a Hamilton single, making it a one point Blue Bomber game, 28-27. Angry Hamilton players, upset all day by referee Paul Dojack's officiating, maintained that the kick was within the cross bars but their protests fell unheeded.

As the fourth quarter began, the fog became thicker and thicker, almost reaching Bleak House proportions. With 9:29 remaining, referee Dojack halted the game, at first temporarily, hoping for some clearing. As Dojack remarked later, "When I couldn't see the sidelines from the hash marks, I knew it was time to stop it." After a thirty minute break in the locker room, the game was suspended until 1:30 p.m. the next day, Sunday, December 2. Commissioner Halter had hoped to arrive at a better solution but Winnipeg and Hamilton management could not agree on a mutually agreeable alternative.

Play resumed on 2 December with 9:29 left on the game clock. After the offensive fireworks of Saturday's contest, Sunday's game proved anticlimactic. Play took only 18 "real" minutes and the game was over by 2 p.m. With no new scoring Winnipeg hung on to its slim lead to win 28-27. Surprisingly some 15,000 spectators returned from Saturday bearing their Grey Cup ticket stubs (no new tickets were sold).

Play resumed with Winnipeg's ball on the Hamilton 54, 2nd and 10. but the Blue Bombers' offensive had atrophied; they gained only 4 offensive yards for the whole day. The Ti-Cats, conversely, gained 105 yards, moving the ball almost at will, but putting no points on the board. Frank Cosentino, the Ti-Cats replacement quarterback, played inspired football, moving the ball twice within single range, and so a tie. With 2:30 left and third down at midfield, Trimble sent in a trick play. Zuger (also the team's punter) would pass from punt formation. Zuger, limping badly from a sprained ankle, rolled out of the pocket, looking for Dick Easterly. Easterly was well set up for the flare; his blockers were well-positioned; but Zuger's pass was low and Easterly dropped it. Cosentino began Hamilton's final drive on his own 17, eventually moving to the Winnipeg 52 with time running out. Zuger tried for the tying single, but the punt rolled to the 3 yard line. Ploen pounced on it there for the Blue Bombers' recovery and a western conference victory, making the Blue Bombers four-time Grey Cup champs in the last five years.

Perhaps the most haunting of the post-game images was the Hamilton Spectator's photo of a dejected Don Sutherin, the Ti-Cats placekicker, still in full uniform, sitting alone, crying silently in the Hamilton dressing room (he had missed two "automatic" converts and two field goals – bitter pills to swallow in a one point loss). As could be expected, much controversy revolved around commissioner's Halte's decision to stop, then complete the game. Coach Grant thought the decision ridiculous: "I could see every pass, every punt, and every flanker. I could see that last pass to Latourelle even though it was on the other side of the field." Grant was further annoyed that referee Dojack had not consulted the players about their feelings on continuing the game on December 1. Tiger-Cats quarterback Joe Zuger concurred with Grant: "All the players wanted to finish it Saturday. You can't go out there after playing three quarters and feel the same way –

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you can't get up. It isn't right." Zuger's teammate Ken Kilreu was more philosophical, even bemused: "Why does it have to be us? Why do we always have to make history?"

Commissioner Halter's decision to provide what Paul Warnick of the Hamilton Spectator called "the world's first two-part football game," or more inelegantly, "the fog fiasco," didn't seem to please anyone. But the controversy didn't detract from the warm reception the Blue Bombers got on their return to Winnipeg on Monday, December 3. Five thousand fans welcomed the Bombers in Winnipeg arena where team co-captains Herb Gray and Steve Patrick were the first entrants, proudly holding the Grey Cup aloft. Leo Lewis, Kenny Ploen, Patrick, Gray, Charlie Shepherd, and Bud Grant all receiving standing ovations. The loudest was awarded to Grant, as ecstatic fans threw a tiger-skin at his feet, making Hamilton's cup of gall just that much more bitter. In the midst of the celebrating, Manitoba's Lieutenant Governor Errick Willis christened the Blue Bombers "The New York Yankees of the Canadian Football League."

And so they were. But not even the Yankees could claim winning a 25 hour game like the iron men of Manitoba.