

THE QUEBEC RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

1883-1906 – Part 2

By Robert Sproule

1890: MCGILL UNIVERSITY

The first seven seasons of the Quebec union proved to be one dominated by the power and strength of the Montreal Football Club. Of the 16 games they had played since Union formation, they had won 15 and tied one and had outscored the opposition 310 points to 33. Seven consecutive provincial titles were theirs as well as the 1884 Dominion Championship. They were indeed unbeatable, and were starting to become too commonplace. A change was needed; if not for them, then for the rest of the union.

Therefore, a change was made in the schedule by the Executive in an effort to boost sagging fan turnout. Britannia would first challenge Montreal to a two-game total-point series with the winner challenging the McGill-15 for provincial honors.

From the start, Montreal quickly got on the scoreboard with three rouges, a safety touch and a try before Arnton dropped a beautiful goal-from-field to make it 9-6 for Montreal. Another 10 points after the break, including another goal-from-field, and Montreal had the first game 19-9.

The return match proved to be more interesting than the first game as first Montreal quickly went ahead 5-0. Then Britannia kicked three rouges to cut the score to 5-3 Montreal. Two more goals-from-field and a rouge put Britannia ahead 16-5. Montreal came back with 13 points to go up 18-16 but Britannia fought back with two more rouges to end the score at 18 all. The tie did nothing for the Brits as Montreal won the series 37 to 27 points.

Again, Montreal was the first to draw first blood, scoring 7 points before McGill was over the line. Two more rouges and Montreal had built up a 9-4 lead at the intermission. And that was all the scoring for Montreal. McGill now resorted to a kicking game with Hamilton starting to get some distance into his punts. Forced into poor field position, Montreal runners failed to make any sizable gains. First one McGill punt was kicked over for a rouge, and then another until the score was narrowed to 9-7. A trick play from scrumage fooled the Montreal defense. Instead of passing the ball out for another kick-over, it was pitched to McDougall and he sped over the line for the upset win, 11-9 for McGill. The Black & Red had been defeated for the first time, by a cleverly executed kicking strategy.

Having finally won the provincial title, McGill planned to celebrate but it was premature as the QRFU Executive announced that McGill would have to accept a late challenge. The newly organized Victoria Football Club wanted to play the university students to a final championship game, winner take all.

For all it mattered, the final outcome was predictable. McGill was at its peak, and had a proven wingline that controlled the likes of Montreal and strong runners and kickers in Hamilton, Walsh and McDougall. The Victoria team, on the other hand, had no playing experience; and as the game progressed, no offense or defense either. McGill quickly found they could control the game in all aspects. Punt returns, fumble returns and onside kicks were turned into trys. McGill's kicking game gave them excellent field position and if a Vic player wasn't grassed on a run or returning a punt he was quickly forced back over the line for a safety touch. A record five consecutive safeties rounded out the scoring and McGill had a provincial championship 41-0.

1890 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agt</u>
MCGILL UNIVERSITY	2	0	0	52	9
MONTREAL Football Club	1	1	1	46	38
BRITANNIA Football Club	0	1	1	27	37
VICTORIA Football Club	0	1	0	0	41

1890 SCORING LEADERS

	<u>trys</u>	<u>goals</u>	<u>p-fk</u>	<u>goals</u>	<u>sin</u>	<u>pts</u>
Jack Campbell, Montreal	2	0	0	1	7	21
John Arnton, Britannia	0	0	0	2	6	18
Walsh, McGill	3	0	0	0	0	12
Hamilton, McGill	0	0	0	1	5	11
McDougall, McGill	2	0	0	0	0	8

1891: THE RETURN OF MONTREAL

The Quebec union made two rule changes for the upcoming season. First of all, the value of the goal-from-field was lowered from 6 to 5 points and the goal-from-try was lowered from 4 to 2 points. The crossbar of the goal post remained at 13 feet from the ground, not 20 as in the Ontario game, and matches still consisted of two 45-minute halves, although it was not uncommon for team captains to cut the game short due to darkness, injury or a certain lopsided win.

The season opened with McGill, provincial champions, accepting a challenge from Bishop's College on the first Saturday in October. Again the famed McGill kicking game continued where if left off from last season, and well executed punts put their runners into excellent scoring position. An unstoppable series of singles, trys and goals-from-trys from start to finish proved the Redmen too strong and they turned aside the Bishop's challenge 38-8.

The next challenge was from the Montreal Football Club and McGill, perhaps over confident, soon found a surprising stronger team battling them at par. No sooner had the match begun than the Referee stopped the game. Leatham was discovered too ill to continue, so Montreal had to play with fourteen players, as no substitute was allowed. McGill scored first but after that it was all Montreal. They rushed the ball up the field and kept the ball in McGill's territory for some time. Soon Mitchell was over for a try and then Higginson recovered a fumble behind the line. With Jack Campbell's goal, Montreal lead 11-1. But then McGill woke up and on a long punt, moved the ball to the other end. A free kick close to the line was followed up by Baker who secured the on side kick for a try. Quick passes out to Goulet resulted in two kicks over the line and Montreal's lead was now 11-7 at the break.

In the second half McGill's fine punting was the difference as they rushed up the field. Miller muffed a catch and McDougall was over the line for the score to tie the game. Another pass to Goulet who quickly punted well down the field and Miller was forced to rouge for the winning score, 12-11 McGill.

Against Britannia, McGill finally met their match. The game bogged down to a stalemate as the wingline controlled the other's running game. It was the kickers that gained any ground as all the points in the first half were scored by the boot. At the break it was a 4-4 tie. In the second half, Britannia outplayed McGill at their quick punting game. McGill seemed to be having problems with the Brit runners as they failed to hold them in check. Trys by

Murphy and Paterson took the game away from McGill. They managed three rouges by Rawings to narrow the score, but Murphy's second tally gave Britannia an unexpected but well earned 18-8 win.

As new provincial champs, Britannia had to defend against the Montreal challenge in the next scheduled game. It would be difficult to assess if the match with McGill was too demanding or that Montreal was hungry for battle. Either way, Britannia, who came up big with an upset win over McGill, came up completely flat against Montreal in the final match of the season. As McGill had dominated Bishop's College, and Britannia had dominated McGill, Montreal totally dominated the Brits from the start. Limiting them to a scant three points off a rouge and a safety, Montreal blasted their cross-town rivals 48-3 to reclaim the provincial championship.

Actually it was the great Jack Campbell that single-handedly won the match for Montreal. All eleven first half points were scored by him and when the final tally was added up, Campbell had set a Canadian football record with 34 points. He ran for four tries, kicked three goals-from-try, one free kick, one goal-from-field and 3 singles. In this one game Jack Campbell, Montreal's runner extraordinaire and kicker supreme, had surpassed his own single season point total.

And then there was controversy. It seemed there was one date left on the schedule and who was going to get it to challenge Montreal was the question. The Brits felt it was theirs as they were the defeated champions and had the right to play Montreal on October 31st. However, *"all challenges for the championship had to be made in writing to the secretary of the Union and accepted by him in the order in which they are received...but the club challenging for the first time, and having given six days notice shall take precedence of a club challenging for the second time."* As such, McGill played Montreal for provincial honors.

Again, it was Jack Campbell Day. No sooner had the game begun than Montreal rushed up the field and Campbell was over for the try. McGill was unable to stop him. Three long runs, a punt return, a rouge and a goal-from-try and Montreal dominated 24-0 at the half. McGill tried to make a game of it in the second half and stop Jack but when cornered by the McGill halves, he passed to teammates who scored. At the final whistle Montreal won the championship 33-9 and Jack scored 21 points. He set a record with 8 tries and 58 points for the season and he was now the Canadian career scoring leader with 19 tries and 158 points.

1891 FINAL STANDINGS

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>For</u>	<u>Agt</u>
MONTREAL Football Club	2	1	0	92	24
McGILL UNIVERSITY	1	2	0	29	62
BRITANNIA Football Club	1	1	0	21	56
BISHOP'S COLLEGE	0	1	0	8	38

1891 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Jack Campbell, Montreal	8	5	1	1	7	58
Reg Rawlings, McGill	1	0	0	0	13	17
McDougall, McGill	2	4	0	0	1	17
Bell, Montreal	2	1	0	0	0	10
Goulet, McGill	0	0	0	0	9	9

For the first time in three years there was another attempt to stage a Dominion Final. There still was much discussion between the two Unions to form a nation body and of course talk of a final crept into the conversations. However, it seems that it was the Clubs themselves that made all the arrangements. Originally scheduled for Saturday November 14, the game was moved back a week because of the Ontario championship. The game ended in a draw and the teams had to replay on Monday November 9. The winners, Osgoode Hall, wanted an extra day of rest and time to make travel arrangements to Quebec. Montreal also needed more

time and had to cancel the original date because of prior obligations.

The match took place at the Montreal AAA Grounds on Saturday November 21 in front of 2,000 fans, a "trifle soft field" according to the papers, and under mild climactic conditions. Osgoode was certainly the better team. They had played more games, had more time to practice, played against tougher opponents and were in better condition. Montreal had played only one game against an obviously weak Britannia team and was uncertain of the speed and power of the Ontario champs. The teams played a cautious game, each looking for the others weakness in the opening minutes. Osgoode scored first but then Montreal took a 2-1 lead with a safety touch. The Hallers demonstrated their speed and passing combinations and moved up the field. They scored two tries to Montreal's rouge to break at the half 11-3.

Osgoode dominated the second half scoring four straight rouges to up the score 15-3. Jack Campbell was unable to break free for any of his famous long runs by the Hallers wingline but managed to set up a converted try by Arthur Fry to make it close. Jamie Smellie scored his second try and Osgoode were Dominion Champions 21-10.

1892: THE BALANCE SCHEDULE

While the Ontario and Quebec unions were celebrating ten years of rugby football, there were three other items of football interest. First of all, Calgary and Edmonton took part in a two-game total-point series to decide the championship of all Alberta. It was the start of the oldest rivalry in western Canada. Next, the Winnipeg Football Club, Osborne Victorias and the St. Johns Royalists formed the first western league, the Manitoba Rugby Football Union and finally, on December 19, 1891 the Canadian Rugby (football) Union was formed as the new governing body of football in Canada. The CRU replaced the old CRFU of 1884-1887 and was to last until the birth of the Canadian Football League in 1958.

There was a change in the schedule in the Quebec union as the Balance Schedule was introduced. All teams played each other an equal number of times and the final standings were based upon a won-lost-tied record. A win counted two points, a tie one point and a lost counted zero. Each of the three teams involved, Montreal, Britannia and McGill, played each other twice for the provincial championship.

The first match was between Montreal and Britannia on the first Saturday in October. Playing with a strong wind, the Brits took the early advantage and led at the half 4-3. But when the teams changed ends and Britannia had the wind against them, they failed to score or hold Jack Campbell and company. Montreal took the opening game 11-4.

The second match of the season pitted the McGill-15 against Montreal who dominated the game closer than the score indicated. The Black & Red made the score 7-0 at the half, which they increased to 11-1 with but a few minutes left in the contest. McGill scored a late converted try but it was too late as Montreal won the game 11-7.

The third match was between Britannia and McGill and was described as one of the toughest fought games in recent memory. Both winglines held the other in check and gains by the runners were few. It was a lucky break for Britannia when they were able to force a McGill player back over the line for a safety touch, a score that they were able to nurse until halftime. Stevenson's fine run in the second period sealed the win for the Brits but the highlight play was McGill's score. Mathieson was given a free kick and from 45 yards out he booted the leather over the bar in fine style. Britannia doubled McGill 8-4.

The bye went to McGill as Montreal and Britannia played at the AAA Grounds the following weekend. The Brits scored first and held on to a slim 1-0 lead until Campbell broke away for a spectacular 55-yard run over the line. The Brits game back with

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three more points to tie it but lost control of the game when Walter Jamieson picked up a fumbled ball and returned it for the score. Moments later, another Brit fumble enabled Jamieson to pick up the ball and ramble the length of the field for the score. The 85-yard jaunt gave Jamieson a record two fumble returns for scores in one game. The teams matched each other point for point in the second half but the damage was done and Montreal won its third straight game, and the season 23-11.

The next to last game of the season was McGill against the Montreal-15 and, perhaps because they had the provincial title in the bag, they were playing simply to complete the season. McGill on the other hand played inspired football. They spotted the champions a 2-0 score in the first half, matched that after the intermission and won the game on a goal-from-field 7-3. But the win was costly. Injuries to several key players forced them to default the last scheduled game to Britannia. Montreal were provincial champs, Britannia second and McGill third.

1892 FINAL STANDINGS

	W	L	T	For	Agt	Pts
MONTREAL Football Club	3	1	0	48	29	6
BRITANNIA Football Club	2	2	0	23	38	4
MCGILL UNIVERSITY	1	3	0	18	22	2

1892 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Jack Campbell, Montreal	1	0	1	0	11	19
Mathieson, McGill	0	1	1	1	1	12
Walter Jamieson, Montreal	2	0	0	0	0	8
James Corbett, Britannia	2	0	0	0	0	8
Percy Miller, Montreal	1	1	0	0	0	6

On November 10, at Toronto, the first Canadian Rugby (football) Union championship game took place between the Montreal Football Club and the Ontario winners, Osgoode Hall. Playing in uncertain weather conditions, the 6 inches of snow and 35°F temperature made the playing field muddy and very slippery. Osgoode started off first with two rouges. When a few runs got them closer, Senkler booted a fine goal-from-the-field. Montreal matched that later on a kick by Miller and the lawyers lead 7-5.

However, as the game progressed, it soon became apparent that they were not accustomed to Osgoode's wingline blocking tactics. At the heeling of the ball, the three-man scrim and one of the wingline would step back and give ground. The other wingline would block and hold. Jamie Smellie, the lawyers quarterback, would make long passes to his halfbacks who stood some 10 to 20 yards apart. Working his passes to either side of the wingline with an occasional buck up the middle, Osgoode ran for large gains. Unable to control the Hallers' sharp passing combination, Montreal started to fall behind. Three consecutive runs over the line and the route was on. Osgoode Hall, up 26-5 at the half, continued running around the weak Montreal wingline in the second. Four more trys were secured over the line to end the contest 45-5. It was the second time in as many years that Montreal failed to understand and control the Osgoode playing tactics.

1893: BACK TO THE CHALLENGE SYSTEM

This year the Quebec Union Executive voted to return to the Challenge System. That meant that as Montreal was last year's Provincial Champions, they had a bye. Britannia felt they were ready to contest for league honors and felt confident to challenge the Quebec City-15. They scored all their first half points on kicks and were ahead 14-4 at the half. Good kicking in the second half gave them prominent field position and they added on to their score for a convincing 23-4 victory.

Against Montreal, the Brits didn't have to play against Jack Campbell as he seemed to have retired. In his place though was the return of Arthur Fry. Perhaps a step or two slower, he could still run and kick with the best of them. As such, this game could best

be described as Arthur Fry Day. He opened with a rouge only to have Britannia go ahead on a run by Gavin. A Free Kick by Fry plus three singles put Montreal up 8-4 at the half. Another run and single put Britannia up by one. Later, toward the last few minutes of the game, Fry got into scoring position and kicked over to tie the match. Moments later he attempted another kick. The ball went over the line and out of the end zone and the tight struggle ended as Montreal triumph 10-9.

The championship for all Quebec was on the line for the final bout of the season, Montreal against the McGill Redmen. The students appeared to have control of the game in the early stages by taking a 3-1 lead but then Arthur Fry found his kicking game and the Black & Red never looked back. Fry's superb kicking counted for 17 points as Montreal blasted the undergraduates 25-3 for the provincial title.

1893 FINAL STANDINGS

	W	L	T	For	Agt
MONTREAL Football Club	2	0	0	35	12
BRITANNIA Football Club	1	1	0	32	14
QUEBEC CITY Football Club	0	1	0	4	23
MCGILL UNIVERSITY	0	1	0	3	25

1893 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Arthur Fry, Montreal	1	3	1	0	11	25
Blair Hill, Britannia	0	0	0	2	1	11
Garvin, Britannia	2	0	0	0	0	8
Johnny Ross, Britannia	0	0	0	0	7	7
Jack Savage, Montreal	1	0	0	0	0	4

The Dominion title was scheduled for Montreal at the AAA Grounds on November 23 and the odds-makers gave the edge to the Quebec champions over the Ontario winners, Queens University. Montreal had played in only two games, had few injuries and were well rested. Queens had played in 7 grueling matches and had injuries to key players.

In front of 3,500 fans and, in spite of the odds and injuries, Queens controlled the game from the opening whistle. They took advantage of the wind and knew when to kick and when to dribble the ball. Charlie Fox was a master quarterback in mixing his plays and kept Montreal off balance the whole game. Queens would score several points before Montreal managed a rouge and three more trys gave them a comfortable 25-2 halftime lead.

In the last half Montreal used bad judgment. They kicked with the wind too often and fumbled in key situations. Their passing plays were constantly disrupted by the Queens' wingmen and as such they failed to mount an effective attack. With their ground and air attack strangled, Montreal ended up on the wrong side of a 29-11 score.

1894: THE OTTAWA TEAMS

Expansion was the word, for this was the year that the Quebec union expanded across the border. The Ottawa City and Ottawa College Rugby Football teams were joining the QRFU for the upcoming season. Montreal, it seemed, was always winning, and there was now a need for fresh blood more than ever. And both players and fans looked forward with interest and excitement from these two "Ontario" teams.

For the Ottawa City club it was a new beginning; a time to start over and a time to gain some recognition. Having put a very competitive team on the field in the early years of the ORFU, Ottawa had fallen on hard times. Actually, the city team had a grudge with the ORFU ever since they lost the 1883 championship game to the Argos over officiating. The Tie Schedules of the late 1880's had forced them out in the first round of play and the final blow came in the recent Elimination Series of 1891 when the lawyers from Osgoode Hall destroyed them 72-3 in the two-game total-point series. There was no team in '92 but the following year

they were knocked out by the Argos. This year, however, was different: a new team in a new league, and there was much excitement in the air.

As for Ottawa College, it was a time to regain some lost respect and honor that was not afforded the team when they last won the ORFU Championship in 1889. Having been forced to withdraw, the collegians tried to make a comeback in the 1892 series only to be blown out by the Argos 34-5. The next year they were scheduled against Queens University, the eventual CRU champs, and although they won the first match they were clobbered in the return engagement and lost the series. Ottawa College was also looking forward to the new season and the keen competition that Quebec was offering.

The schedule was simple; the two Ottawa teams, the two Montreal city clubs and McGill University embarked on a 10-game series. Each team played the other once and the team with the most wins was declared the champions.

In spite of the unseasonable cold wind blowing in Montreal, Ottawa College enjoyed the warm hospitality of Britannia. Levesque was the star of the game for the scholars. He scored two tries, a goal-from-try, a goal-from-field and a single to lead his team to a 21-3 defeat of the Brits.

For the first half of the Montreal at Ottawa City match, both clubs fought tooth and nail for control. Scoring all their points on kicks, Ottawa was ahead 9-7 at intermission. But then the dam broke. Arthur Fry returned a punt to put his team ahead for good and the rout was on. Montreal scored 28 unanswered points to blast the Ottawa players 36-9!

The McGill-Britannia match was a lot tighter than the score indicated. Playing in the rain and the mud, the Brits outplayed the students on the strength of three safety touches but then a few lucky breaks gave McGill the ball near the line. They pushed over two tries to take the lead and the contest ended in their favor 14-9.

The match between the two Ottawa clubs was the first meeting since the days of the Ontario union and it clearly demonstrated the strength of each. The city team still had not obtained qualified players and as such were no match for the precision running and kicking of the College-15. James, Gleeson and Levesque simply overpowered the city team 26-1.

Against Britannia, Montreal could do nothing wrong. Their kicking game gave them good field position and they soon had a 25-0 tally by the intermission. Then Britannia tried to make a game of it as Charley Anderson and Percy Sanderson took turns kicking. They managed to narrow the score to 25-11, but their rally was cut short as Montreal kept pace with the Garnet and Grey of Ottawa College for an important 31-11 win.

The game on Saturday October 20 was the first meeting of the season between the two university teams, McGill and the Ottawa College-15, and there were many followers to cheer their favorites on. Playing with similar styles, the lead changed hands several times before a winner was proclaimed. First, McGill went ahead 3-0 then Ottawa scored two tries to take the lead 9-3. After intermission the Ottawans made the score 14-3 and seemed to gain control of the game. But it was short lived as the Redmen scored two tries and a penalty kick to regain the lead 17-14. Some fine kicking over the line by Ottawa tied the score in the latter stages of the contest but then Trenhome's punt put McGill up by one. Ottawa got that one back moments later but, in the last minute of play, a pass from scrimmage and some key blocking allowed Prud'homme to streak over the line for the thrilling 22-18 victory.

Whatever offense McGill displayed against Ottawa College was missing the following weekend against Montreal. Unable to generate any kind of an effect attack, they failed to make important play selections to get over the line. As well, they were unable to control the likes of Arthur Fry. He out-ran and out-kicked the entire McGill team as he put on a one-man show and scored all of Montreal's points for a convincing 15-4 win.

Ottawa City kept the score close, 9-8, in the first half. But then

the two Brit stars, Charley Anderson and Percy Sanderson, proved too much as they ran all over and through the Ottawa line. Several more points were set up by these two and Britannia won its first match of the season, 20-12. The loss proved too much. Injuries compounded the problem and the Capital City boys defaulted their last game with McGill.

Ottawa College and Montreal met for the QRFU championship. In contrast the Garnet and Grey dominated the first half of play and ran up an impressive 10-lead. In the second half, Montreal dominated the game, outscoring the students 10-4 but fell short in their comeback. The difference gave the Ottawa College-15 their first ever Quebec provincial championship 14-11. The Ottawa collegians had finally gained some lost respect and recognition.

1894 FINAL STANDINGS

	W	L	T	For	Agt	Pts
OTTAWA COLLEGE	4	0	0	83	33	8
MONTREAL Football Club	3	1	0	92	38	6
McGILL UNIVERSITY	2	2	0	36	46	4
BRITANNIA Football Club	1	3	0	42	78	2
OTTAWA CITY Football Club	0	4	0	22	80	0

1894 SCORING LEADERS

	trys	goals	p-fk	goals	sin	pts
Arthur Fry, Montreal	5	3	0	0	18	44
Levesque, Ottawa College	4	3	0	1	1	28
Percy Sanderson, Britannia	0	1	1	1	3	14
James Gleeson, Ottawa College	0	0	0	0	13	13
Jack Savage, Montreal	0	1	0	1	4	11

The Canadian Final was between Queens and Ottawa College. The teams were equal in all respects. Each had a strong and experienced wingline, fast runners, and excellent kickers who could punt themselves out of danger or into good field position. The decisive factor would be who would outlast the other at the final whistle. In front of 4,000 fans at Rosedale Field, Queens drew first blood, going ahead 3-0. Ottawa came back by bucking for important yards which resulted in the go-ahead try. Two kicks raised the score 6-3 for Ottawa College but the lead changed hands as Kennedy's fine run for a try made it Queens University 7, Ottawa College 6. With minutes left in the match, the Ottawa kickers started to get some distance in their wind-aided punts to tie it up, and then won it 8-7 on Murphy's well-placed touch-in-goal. It was the first time since 1884 that a team from Quebec had won the Canadian football championship.

Not only was the Ottawa team well received by the Quebec fans and likewise by the Ottawans but also there were noticeable gains by the scoring leaders. Arthur Fry had set a record for most singles (18) and points (44) in a season. Levesque of Ottawa College was second in scoring with 28 points and Percy Sanderson of the Britannia club was third with 14 points. All in all, fans and players looked forward to the next season with much anticipation.

At the December 1 Annual General Meeting of the Quebec Union, there were several changes brought up to improve the game. First, the Ottawa teams motioned for interference for the runner. That was defeated. Then it was suggested that the attacking team must gain 5 yards or lose not more than 20 yards in three scrimmages (downs) or the other side gets the ball. This was defeated. Then it was suggested that the men in the scrimmage be allowed to hand out the ball. This was defeated as well. Then it was motioned to have two umpires to assist the referee. Defeated. However, the points from Penalty Kicks were reduced from four points to two.

To be continued