



SPORTS & LEISURE

Cousens happy upholding law in CFL

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Staff Writer

Hamilton's Ivor Wynne Stadium is usually considered a hostile environment for the guys wearing the zebra stripes during the annual Labour Day Classic and TigerCat fans were in an exceptionally growly mood for the 2006 edition of the Canadian Football League contest.

Their team hadn't scored a touchdown in four games and the hated-rival Toronto Argonauts were routing the home side 40-6, led by record-setting quarterback Damon Allen. The roar of the 30,000 sold-out crowd dulled to a purr as the dejected Steeltown faithful began to leave early in the fourth quarter, but on the sidelines, located just a few feet from the stands, the officiating crew is still being berated by a few mostly overrefreshed patrons.

"Working Ivor Wynne is special because like no other CFL stadium, you feel like the fans are right on top of you," said Georgetown's Don Cousens, a CFL

official for eight years and the head linesman for the TiCats-Argos matchup. "It's great for the personal fan touch. I don't interact with them at all, but they certainly interact with me."

Then there are the players and coaches, whom Cousens says are generally respectful of the officials, but the emotions of a big game and the pressure to win can lead to some colourful sideline conversations. Hamilton quarterback Jason Maas ran almost half way across the field to question a stoic Cousens after another TigerCat drive fell short of a first down.

"You're getting it from the coaches on the sideline and there's no escape. Some of them are pretty animated because their business is to win and when they're not winning, it's not fun anymore, so we as officials tend to give them a bit of rope when they carry on."

A staff sergeant with the Halton Regional Police Service, the 48-year-old Cousens started with high school and junior football officiating about 25 years ago, moved up to the Canadian university ranks and his first CFL game was between Toronto and Hamilton in June of 1998. He currently works 16 to 20 games a season and while it seems as though the job

description calls for a lot of standing around, the officials begin workouts in March and attend a training camp in April to prepare for the six-month CFL season.

And there's a safety factor to be aware of as well.

Cousens suffered torn knee cartilage when he was involved in a sideline collision in Edmonton last season, causing him to have surgery. As head linesman, his job involves making sure everything's legal at the initial line of scrimmage, covering short passes and getting the forward point of progress on rushes, all while making sure the six-person sideline crew is doing its job.

"Everyone takes

it for granted that they're just a stick crew, but they can have a significant impact on the outcome of the game," Cousens added. "There's so much going on during the game— never mind about the off-field distractions with the fans behind you. As the head linesman you've got to keep your crew's heads in the game as well."

It's no surprise that Cousens would be assigned to the crew of the Labour Day Classic, especially with Allen surpassing Warren Moon's all-time pro football passing yardage record. Cousens has been to three Grey Cups and figures to be a lead candidate for this year's championship game in Winnipeg.

"Don has a calmness that comes with experience that just sets himself up to be

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'I don't interact with them (the fans) at all, but they certainly interact with me.'

—CFL official
Don Cousens

Don Cousens, a staff sergeant with Halton Police, has been officiating CFL games for the past eight seasons and is a leading candidate to officiate this year's Grey Cup game.

Photo courtesy Hamilton Tiger-Cats

Raiders complete free pass to students

Every student in Halton Hills will receive a free pass to a Georgetown Jr. A Raiders' hockey team for the 2006-07 Provincial Jr. A Hockey League season and players from the squad were at St. Catherine of Alexandria Catholic School recently to distribute tickets to Ungolo Ettore's Grade 5 class. Each school will have its own Saturday night home game to attend. From left are Raiders Ryan Torres, Jon Southgate, Jeremy Whelan, Ryan Ford and Rob Sgarbossa.

Photo by Eamonn Maher



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