

QUARTERBACK CELEBRATES BIRTHDAY

Veteran has keyed team's turnaround,
rebounding from a slow start to season

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THE GAZETTE

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On the day of his 35th birthday, Anthony Calvillo said he felt like a spry 30-year-old. Give the guy credit for honesty. At least he didn't claim to feeling like he was in his 20s, although it could be argued he's playing like he is.

Following a slow start to the season – much like his teammates – Calvillo's game is coming around. The Alouettes' veteran quarterback has passed for 1,824 yards, along with eight touchdowns. He has been intercepted only four times, and has been picked off only once in the last six games.

He has completed 71.6 per cent of his passes – highest in the Canadian Football League – while throwing for 300 yards in three games, including his last, two weeks ago, against Calgary.

"I don't see him (being) 35," said Marcel Bellefeuille, Montreal's offensive co-ordinator. "His level of play is that of a younger man. He still has youthful qualities. He has fun, is laughing and enjoys the game. He has that youthfulness. You see a lot of vets lose that."

Now in his 14th season, Calvillo knows the end is likely just over the horizon, making him appreciate the moment more. It's easy for him to realize how fortunate he has been, when he looks down the road to Toronto and sees Damon Allen, the ageless one, injured again after temporarily losing his starting position. Or when Calvillo gazes across the country and sees British Columbia's Dave Dickenson concussed yet again.

"I'm trying not to look too far, especially at my age," said Calvillo, who didn't receive the perfunctory pie-in-the-face, as did slotback Ben Cahoon last month, on his 35th birthday. "As I get older, I really appreciate what I do. To have played so many years is a blessing. You never know when it'll end, so I'm soaking it all in."

"There are guys I played with who no longer are here. They



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THE FOOTBALL BLOG
THAT TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

told me to enjoy it while it lasts, and that's what I'm doing."

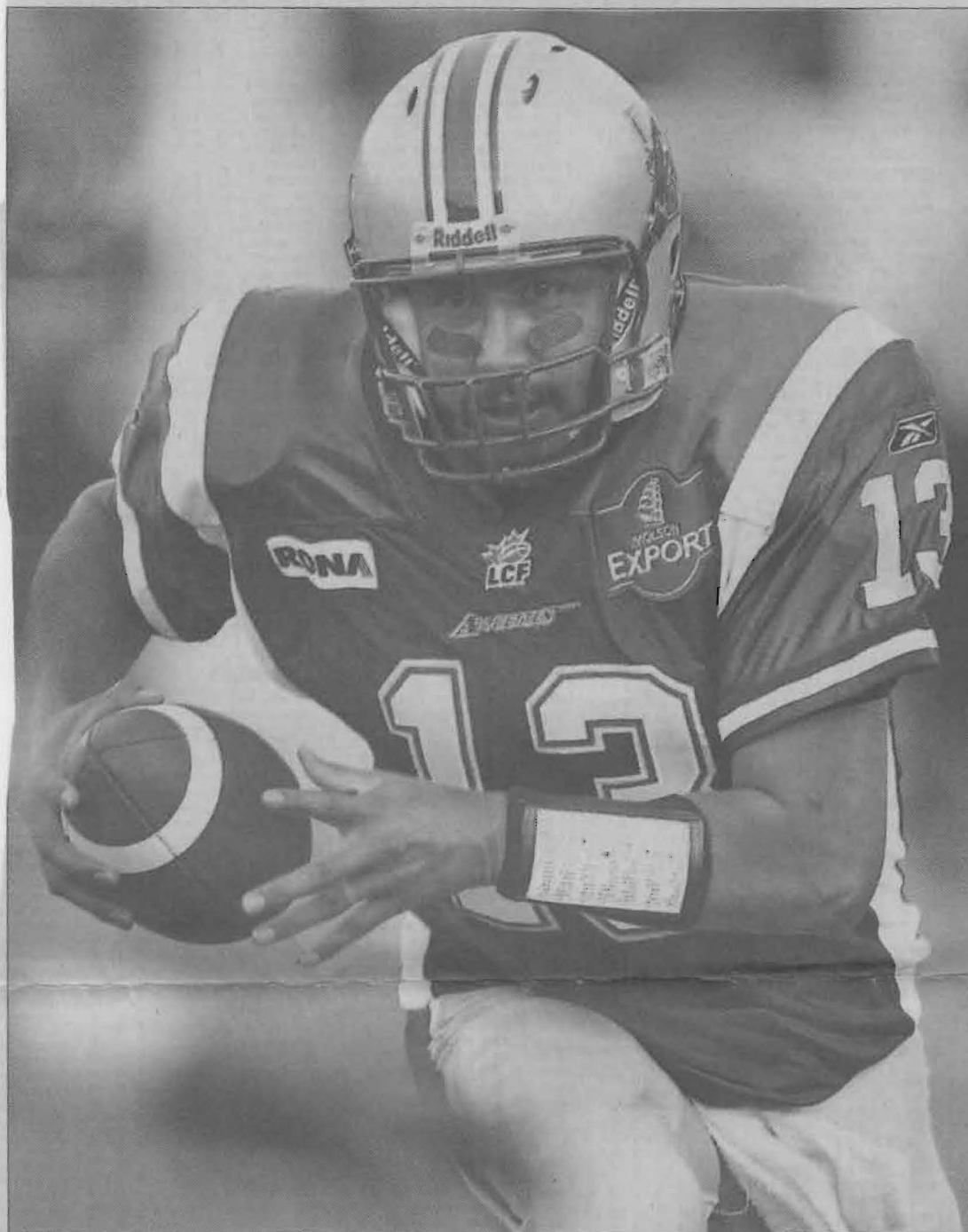
Neither the Als, nor Calvillo, have produced a 60-minute effort on offence, but the quarterback has had his moments. Twice this season, against Winnipeg and the Stampeders, he has completed all but five of his passes. Calvillo has been strong in the first half of games, but has lacked some consistency over the final 30 minutes, allowing teams to remain in games when Montreal should have buried them.

While the plays are still being called by Bellefeuille, Calvillo said there's improved communication between the two. The quarterback is being allowed to rank the plays that will potentially be called when they meet and institute the game plan.

"Since we've limited a lot of the protection on the offensive line, it has helped them out mentally," Calvillo explained. "We're taking care of the ball and not turning it over too often. And we have a balanced attack. The last few weeks we've been consistent."

Cahoon agreed with Calvillo, saying the reduced offensive package has made it easier to approach games. Cahoon denied a smaller package will eventually lead to reduced production.

"There's more of a comfort level. By reducing the game plan, we've simplified things," he said. "It got to the point where there



PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

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were too many plays to choose from. You can't master 250 different plays. But you can work and refine your skills off 50 or 60."

Calvillo had no extensive or elaborate plans to celebrate 35 years on the planet. He planned on enjoying a Mexican fiesta dinner with family, topped off with cake and his favourite, Rocky Road ice cream. While contemplating tomorrow night's game against Hamilton – a team

against which he has 37 touchdowns and only 15 interceptions in 29 matches.

Calvillo isn't losing sleep over his contract status. He's eligible to become a free agent in February. Following brief negotiations in May, no further talks have taken place between Calvillo and general manager Jim Popp. Calvillo historically is loath to talk contract during the season.

"Whether we do it now or at

the end. Whether that commitment is now or later, it doesn't matter, as long as it comes. And I believe it will," Calvillo said. "When the season's over, we have two or three months to get it done. I've not thought about testing the market. This is where I want to end my career."

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