

Duval enjoying new life

MOVES SOUTH

'I'd like to play,
but football
doesn't define me'

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Damon Duval lives next to a golf course in Auburn, Ala., where he played collegiately for the Tigers. And on Monday, he celebrated the U.S. Memorial Day holiday by taking a spin on his 18-foot boat.

Canadian Football League player and boat usually aren't found in the same sentence.

More than three months after his divorce from the Alouettes after six seasons as their kicker, Duval appears to be mentally at ease with his life and at peace with himself. The family moved south in January, in effect, signalling the end of his Montreal career. That news became official in mid-February, when the team failed to make the free agent a contract offer.

He has said little since then, other than conducting an oc-

casional radio interview.

"Honestly, this is one of the best things my family and myself decided to do. I'm the happiest and most confident I've been in six years, and am enjoying life," Duval told The Gazette by telephone - his first newspaper interview since his departure. "I have a (mobile car wash) business, have found a new life and am having fun again.

"I've taken a step back here and re-evaluated myself. I'd like to play and feel I can play, but football doesn't define me."

The 2010 season was a trying one for Duval. Scott Squires, the Als' special teams coach, resigned over the winter and his replacement, Richard Kent, was fired early in training camp. Duval also missed three games with a lingering groin injury.

Duval missed 13 of 47 field goals attempts (72.3 per cent average), although his punting was solid, averaging 45 yards. His directional punting, however, could have been better. In Montreal's Grey Cup victory against Saskatchewan, Duval missed two of four attempts, from 31 and 41 yards. And his seven punts averaged only 32.4 yards.

Duval claimed he was told

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PIERRE OBENDRAUF GAZETTE FILE PHOTO
Former Als kicker Damon Duval had a rough year in 2010 and was not offered a contract in the off-season.

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Duval claimed he was told early in the season, by a coach he refused to identify, that confidence in his ability was lacking. Duval said it wasn't head coach Marc Trestman. Duval never overcame the affront.

"When someone doesn't have confidence in you, it affects you," he said. "I backed myself into a corner and shut down.

"I ended up hitting rock bottom," Duval added. "I never made the mental adjustment after Squires left. I never gave myself a chance. I put more pressure on myself and (the results) showed on the field."

Fairly or not, Duval, 31, was linked to the hip to former Als president Larry Smith, his father-in-law. Duval's critics suggested Smith's presence resulted in his employment and six-figure salary. And, when Smith resigned at the end of December, it was believed that started the

chain of events that resulted in Duval's exodus.

"I did a very good job of separating family from business," Duval said. "But it probably did affect me. Still, I honestly don't think, having Larry there or not, would have changed things one bit."

For the most part, Duval's play was unparalleled. He established a team record in 2009, with 242 points. He was a three-time East Division all-star and CFL all-star twice. The league's players voted him to their all-star team four times.

"His body of work is incredible," said his agent, Fred Weinrauch. "He did all three (punt, field goals and kickoffs) and changed the layout of the land when it came to kicking. A lot of the young kickers looked up to him, because he made it apparent you had to do all three. Damon was part of that evolution."

While disappointed not to have received a contract offer, Duval re-

fuses to burn bridges. And he has watched with curiosity over what has transpired since - the trading of a first-round draft choice to B.C. for Sean Whyte along with this week's signing of Sandro DeAngelis, recently released by Hamilton.

"I have no bad words or blood. This is a business," Duval said. "I have nobody to blame but myself. I didn't adjust and move on.

"I kind of knew they weren't going to sign me back. I didn't get a call from (general manager) Jim Popp until (I was about to become a free agent).

"Popp gave me my opportunity in 2005 to win a job. I was fortunate to play on the same team for six years straight, and I have two Grey Cup championships. I hope to get another opportunity but, if I don't, I'm happy and have moved on with my life."

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