

Mackey gets a second life with Als

At middle linebacker two weeks after release

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THE GAZETTE

THURS. 26 JULY 2007

TORONTO — In the Canadian Football League, never say never.

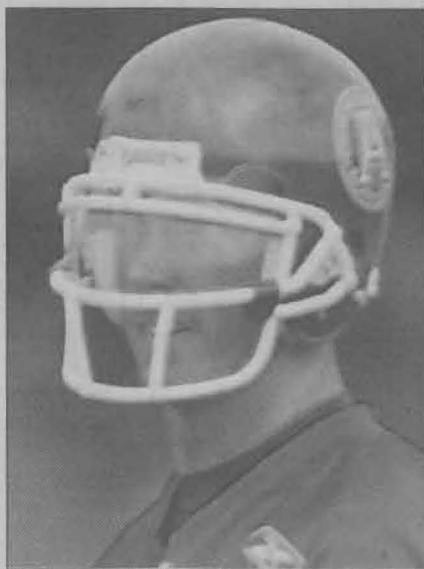
Louis Mackey has returned to the Alouettes, about two weeks after being released from the team's practice roster, and will start at middle linebacker tonight against the Argonauts. He replaces the injured Kai Ellis.

Mackey, who started four games for Montreal last season and was dressed for 10, returned home to Beaumont, Tex., spending time with his family and recovering from the rigours of this game, when the phone rang last Saturday. Als associate head coach Brad Miller was on the other end of the line, asking Mackey whether he was interested in returning. He agreed, despite knowing Ellis will probably return to his starting role once he recovers from a foot injury.

"I was real surprised, but in this game, anything can happen," Mackey said. "Coaches make decisions they feel lead to the best fit for the team. I accepted my release and didn't feel bad. It's a business thing."

"But I always dreamed about coming back."

Mackey spent two years with the Dallas Cowboys, dressing for 16 games, before making his way to the Als last season. He finished the regular season on the practice roster, but dressed for the East Division final and Grey Cup.



CANWEST FILE PHOTO

Mike McMahon: likely Argos' starter.

Although the 5-foot-11, 225-pounder adds speed and versatility, he wasn't able to dislodge the bigger Ellis.

"He's very similar to Kai," said Chris Jones, the Als' defensive coordinator. "He's big, physical and fast. He's a good run defender and has good recognition. He's physical and emotional."

The Als have made two other significant defensive changes. Rookie Jesse Hendrix replaces the injured Davis Sanchez at strong-side cornerback, while Alain Kashama and John Bowman will receive increased playing time at rush-end after the release of R-Kal Truluck.

Hendrix isn't a CFL neophyte. He attended training camp with British Columbia in 2006, and has dressed for

three Montreal games this season, being used as an extra defensive back.

"I'll just try to come in and do a consistent job, like Sanchez," Hendrix said. "I hope it's not a noticeable change."

Playing on the wide side, Hendrix might not get many opportunities. But he understands that because he's a rookie, the Argos could attempt to exploit him.

"There's always that potential, especially when they know it's a rookie, to test him," he said. "If they're thinking that way, I'm going to be ready."

Toronto's expected to start CFL rookie Mike McMahon at quarterback for the ailing Michael Bishop. McMahon had 14 NFL starts between Detroit and Philadelphia, but struggled last weekend, at Calgary, completing only six of 18 passes for 58 yards. The Argos were held to four first downs in the opening half.

McMahon later called the start "ugly," and was replaced by veteran Damon Allen to begin the fourth quarter.

"If we evaluated quarterbacks on their first start, there would be lots of Hall of Famers cut after the first week," Toronto head coach Mike Clemons said. "I cautioned people about their optimism concerning him. And now I will ... caution people about their pessimism towards him."

Clemons believes McMahon has the potential to eventually become a CFL starter.

"There's a good chance we'll get a glimpse (tonight) of seeing whether that's sooner or later," he said.

But McMahon isn't expected to have either wide-receiver Tony Miles or slot-back Arland Bruce at his disposal. Both are injured.