

McElveen expresses desire to return to Alouettes

But defensive lineman's future in limbo after team has 'moved on,' Popp says

HERB ZURKOWSKY

THE GAZETTE

TUES. 24 APR. 2012

After vowing he was unlikely to ever play again for the Alouettes, free-agent defensive lineman Jermaine McElveen has had a change of heart – caused mostly because of the departure of defensive coordinator Tim Tibesar.

McElveen, in his first comments since the end of last season, now said he would welcome the opportunity of re-signing with Montreal, the only Canadian Football League home he has known since 2008. The problem is, with training camp scheduled to begin at Bishop's University in early June, has he waited too long?

"I don't know if I'd be coming back to Tibesar," McElveen told *The Gazette* on Monday from his Atlanta home. "Tibesar's a good dude, and we had a lot of injuries

last year. Tibesar's not a bad coach, but there are things he could have done differently. He could have taken more advice.

"Tibesar didn't use players to their ability."

Tibesar left the Als last winter for Purdue University and has been replaced by the liberal Jeff Reinebold, a free thinker and the former head coach of the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. More than one defensive player has expressed enthusiasm over what they perceive will be a change in direction, attitude and style.

"It'll be a new fit on defence, a new style," McElveen said. "I'm excited to be part of this. It's something new."

Despite recording a career-high eight quarterback sacks in 2010, McElveen was used sparingly last season and was a healthy scratch for the Als' East Division semifinal loss, at home, against Hamil-

ton. The 6-foot-4, 250 pounder dressed for 10 games, but was a healthy scratch for Montreal's final five regular-season games.

He didn't hide his displeasure when the players were cleaning out their lockers at Olympic Stadium before returning home for the winter. Going public with his discontent didn't sit well with head coach Marc Trestman, who expressed his feelings to McElveen "Me and Marc Trestman had a good talk about the situation," McElveen admitted. "The comments I made were in the heat of the moment. I've always played with my heart on my sleeve. I wouldn't have said any of that if we hadn't lost, but Anthony Calvillo threw for 500 yards (against the Tiger-Cats) and we still lost because the defence didn't touch the quarterback.

"I was just a little frustrated."

Now, the problem is the Als might have grown frustrated with McElveen.

"It has been a soap opera, waiting," general manager



DAN RIEDLHUBER REUTERS FILE PHOTO

Alouettes' Jermaine McElveen says the team will have a "new style" on defence, but will he be a part of it?

Jim Popp said. "We made him offers back in January. We heard some initial reaction and then nothing for six weeks."

At age 27, McElveen wanted to explore potential NFL opportunities, knowing the window probably was open for the final time in his career. But he had one workout only, with Jacksonville, and wasn't offered a contract.

McElveen recently, and

unexpectedly, called Marcel Desjardins, the Als' assistant GM, expressing a desire to return. But there have been many developments over the winter, including the free-agent additions of three defensive players – Rod Davis, Aaron Hunt and Mark Restelli. Much of the team's salary-cap has been spoken for at this juncture, although Popp said he'll discuss McElveen with his coaches later

this week, when the team meets in Orlando for a three-day mini-camp.

"Basically, we've moved on, but we'll see," Popp said. "After you wait around, you make other decisions. He opened up the talks and it has been a month since then. We had coaches' meetings (in North Carolina). We know who we have. It gets to the point where you move on. But if he does want to return, I'll talk to the coaches."

McElveen knows he has backed himself into a corner. He said he's prepared to come to training camp and fight for a position, feeling confident in his ability. He also said he's willing to sign a contract that includes a low base salary, but is incentive-filled.

Of course, as a free agent, McElveen's free to sign with any other CFL team as well. But he has had that opportunity since mid February. No organization has made his signing a priority.

hzurkowsky@
montrealgazette.com
twitter.com/HerbZurkowsky1