

FOCUS ON: CFL Alouettes left tackle, after winning league award, credits GM Popp for his draft priorities

# Bourke is latest to stand tall

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The Alouettes' run of Grey Cup appearances and championships was broken this season, but not their string of producing outstanding offensive linemen.

Josh Bourke, who plays the all-important position of left-tackle for Montreal, was named the Canadian Football League's outstanding offensive lineman Thursday night, during a ceremony at the Vancouver Convention Centre.

Bourke becomes the third Als player in four years – after guard Scott Flory in both 2008 and '09 – to capture the award, and the sixth since 1999, when it was won by Uzooma Okeke. Other Montreal winners have included Pierre Vercheval (2000) and Bryan Chiu (2002).

"Over the years, Jim (general manager Popp) has focused his drafts on offensive linemen, and he has done a hell of a job," Bourke told The Gazette by telephone from Vancouver on Friday. "In Montreal, if you're drafted and play well, you'll stick around."

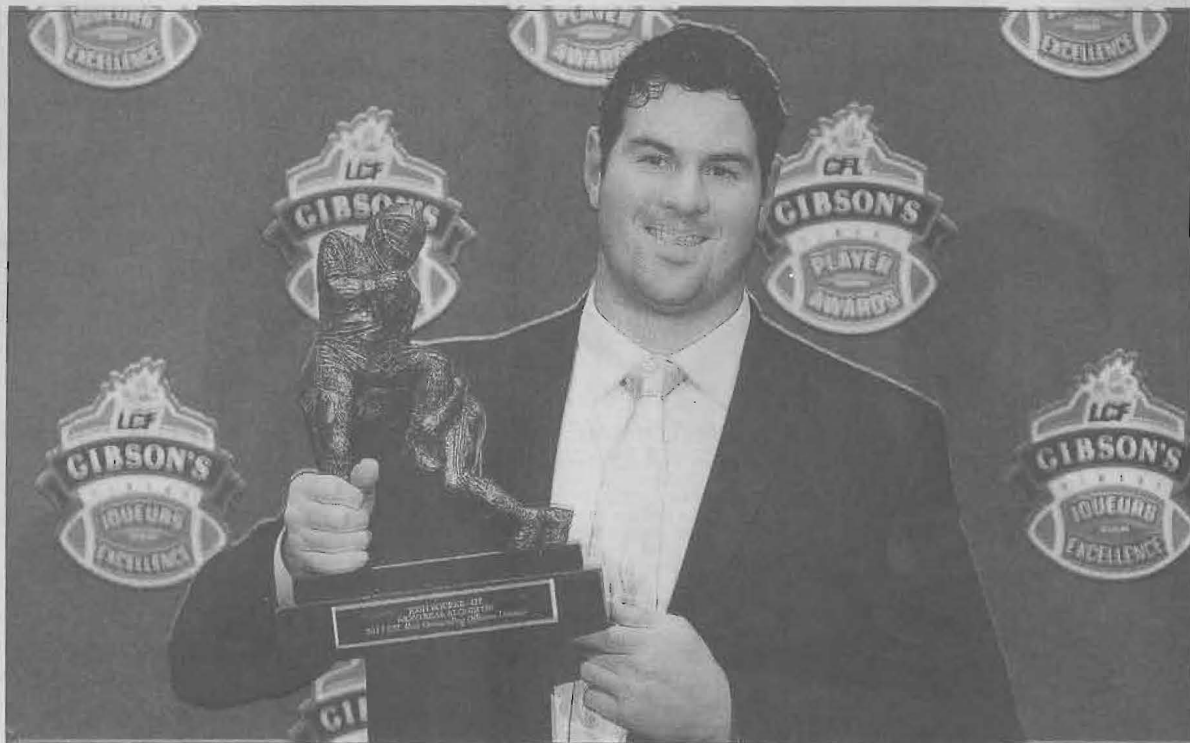
"There's a standard that has been established. We're the only all-Canadian offensive line in the league. Winning this is special."

Bourke received 35 of 62 votes cast by members of the Football Reporters of Canada, a national chapter and CFL head coaches. The West Division nominee in the category was British Columbia's Jovan Olafioye.

Bourke was one of three Montreal division finalists, but the only winner.

Quarterback Anthony Calvillo was the runner-up as the league's outstanding player for the second consecutive year. This season, he was beaten by Lions QB Travis Lulay, who received 44 of 62 votes. And kicker Sean Whyte was a distant second to Edmonton running-back Jerome Messam as outstanding Canadian, Messam receiving 55 votes.

Bourke, recovering from a late-season torn pectoral muscle, is ex-



BEN NELMS REUTERS

Alouettes' Josh Bourke, who was named Most Outstanding Lineman at the CFL Player Awards in Vancouver, said one reason this season was difficult was because other teams "seemed to play their best against us."

pected to be ready for the start of training camp next June. While the Als were decimated with injuries to their secondary, losing four starters, along with two starting linebackers, Bourke's injury might have been the most damning.

Montreal scored only one point in its final regular-season game, at B.C., then was eliminated by Hamilton in the division semifinal in overtime. Although the Als scored 44 points against the Tiger-Cats, Calvillo was sacked three times. And the Lions recorded four sacks the week before.

"As an offensive lineman, you're usually not in the limelight," Bourke said. "People don't know how important you are until someone's hurt and things are exposed – although the guys did a good job of rallying."

"It was one of those years where we couldn't get over the hump," he added. "After the first couple of games, I thought we were signifi-

cantly better. But then the secondary was decimated. And all the teams seemed to play their best against us. They'd play like crap one week but, against us, looked like world-beaters.

"This will make us stronger and hungrier."

Bourke, a third-round (21st overall) draft choice in 2004, has spent his entire five-year CFL career with the Als following a stint with the Green Bay Packers. He was eligible to become a free agent this February but signed a contract extension – never made public – during the season, taking him through 2013.

When Bourke returns to camp, he expects he'll continue blocking for Calvillo, although the two have not had the chance to talk in Vancouver.

"I have a feeling he's going to be back. You can see his passion and willingness to compete," Bourke said. "He has something left in the tank."

Bourke's not even concerned Cal-

villo will turn 40 during the upcoming season, due to his winter workout regimen and diet.

"It's the way he mentally prepares and never takes many hits," Bourke said. "He knows where to go with the ball."

**Notes** - Bourke, already named to the CFL all-star team, which is selected by the FRC, was one of six Als named to the league's players' association squad, selected by his peers and positional coaches. He was joined by Calvillo, running-back **Brandon Whitaker**, slotback **Jamel Richardson**, linebacker **Chip Cox** and rush-end **John Bowman**. Over 470 ballots were cast. ...

While receiving an honorary degree from McGill this week, Als owner **Robert Wettenhall** told RDS he anticipates Calvillo will return in 2012. The two have met once already and have another session scheduled next week.

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