



TOM CASSESSE:

A BONUS ALOUETTES DIDN'T EXPECT



Flanker Tom Cassesse has fulfilled all the expectations of Alouette coach Kay Dalton in his first CFL season. Cassesse can go two ways as pass catcher and defensive back.

When the Montreal Alouettes lured Joe Scanella away from C.W. Post College to become their new offensive coach, they didn't expect to get a bonus for doing it.

But they did. His name is Tom Cassesse, a dazzling 190-pounder flanker who has easily fulfilled the club's aspirations as a first year performer in Canadian professional football.

Cassesse, a 24 year-old with a great pair of catching hands, has become one of the Alouettes three best receivers this season and the reason he is with the CFL team at all is Scanella.

The Als' new coach had Cassesse under him at C.W. Post before the dark-haired youngster set out to make his mark in pro ball.

"He was a good one at C.W. Post and I didn't hesitate a moment in recommending him to the Alouettes," said Scanella.

Cassesse has been a sparkler in an otherwise dismal football year for the Montrealers. He has managed to pick off four touchdown passes, which put him right up with the Eastern leaders -- Tommy-Joe Coffey of Hamilton, who grabbed six, Whit Tucker of Ottawa five, and Jim Thorpe of Argos, who also had four catches. He had 21 pass receptions by mid-September for 427 yards, which made him the No 1

'catcher' on the Als. Bill Starr with 26 for 370 and Peter Dalla Riva with 17 for 308 are the club's other two top pass catching players.

Cassese is also a defensive back although the Als haven't employed him as such too much this year. He was used as a deep back in a particular club formation in the early-season games but head coach Kay Dalton canned the idea and now employs him only one way—on offense. However, should the occasion arise or injuries hit the club, the Als can always play Cassese on defense. In the exhibition games, he showed he wasn't out of his class completely.

Scanella figures Cassese has a bright future in Canadian football and hopes to be around to see him develop.

"Tom has a fine pair of hands and I think he's a really fine football player," said Scanella in assessing the youthful New Yorker. Scanella figures the only rap against Cassese is the fact he had difficulty adjusting to blocking assignments. "But that's nothing new for a player like Tom who is a wide receiver. They all have this trouble. Some overcome it and others don't. I think Tom will change in time and become a fine blocker as well as a receiver for the Alouettes," added Scanella.

One of the big plusses Cassese has going for him is the fact he makes such tremendous broken field moves after he catches the ball. In a recent game against Ottawa, he picked off a pass with one hand in full flight and was long gone behind the Ottawa defender for a touchdown. It was a picture play.

Unlike some imports, Cassese has been extremely successful this season against the Grey Cup champion Ottawa Rough Riders. One of the Alouette assistant coaches commented, "Tom has done real well against the Riders. They don't seem to be the problem for him that they are for so many others."

Cassese, who has caught five passes in a game twice during the current campaign, is revelling in the Alouette Spotlight after an outstanding college career at C.W. Post.

He came off the college campus to join the Denver Broncos of the American Football League but the jump was too much even for him admits Cassese.

"I was one of those raw-boned rookies with no experience and man it sure showed when I got to the Denver camp," confesses Cassese.

But the ace pass-catcher didn't let his Denver setback bother him. He moved on to the Westchester Bulls, a New York Giants' farm club in the Atlantic Conference, and became an instant success. In fact it was because of his prolific year in 1968 with the Bulls that he and Starr were picked up by the Alouettes and signed to contracts.

Starr, a tight end, and Cassese are old high school friends. Both attended Holy Cross High School in New York and ended up playing together at Westchester last season and now this year with Montreal. The two share bachelor's quarters in the city's famed Habitat '67 housing project along with team quarterback Sonny Wade and Bill Rhodes, the club's tough offensive tackle.

A swinger off the field with the long sideburns and the mod clothes, Cassese is all business on a football field and he hopes his first year impression in the CFL will assure him of a 1970 contract.

The Alouettes may not have much to be thankful for this season but they can't help but be pleased with the way Tom Cassese has come along—it's a bonus they weren't expecting at the start of 1969. •



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