

# Hunt agrees to contract

GM Popp has yet  
to see signature

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Several days ago, when free agency began in the Canadian Football League, Jim Popp made his pitch for Aaron Hunt, heard nothing back, and figured he was out of the running for the bulky defensive tackle.

But now Hunt's on the verge of becoming an Alouette and has verbally agreed to a contract with Montreal although Popp, the team's general manager, still had no signed document in his possession early Sunday evening.

Hunt, whose offseason home's in Denison, Tex., failed to return a message left by The Gazette on Sunday. But on Saturday, he went out of his way on Twitter (@ahunt90) to inform the world he was headed to the Als after spending his entire six-year CFL career with the British Columbia Lions.

"Bittersweet day today but I figured it would feel this way!" he wrote. "Time to turn another page in the chapter of A. Hunts book!"

That was followed by another Tweet: "I gotta ask does anyone have a hook up on that Rosetta stone? I gotta learn some French!! Lol."

The 31-year-old Hunt is an imposing figure in the middle, at 6-foot-3 and 280 pounds. He's a two-time CFL all-star, including last season, when he produced seven quarterback sacks. That increased his career total to 41 sacks, including his season-high 11 in 2008.

Why would Hunt be prepared to leave the defending Grey Cup champions? Quite elementary. He became disillusioned because the process went this far and he became a free agent.

Hunt earned about \$130,000 last season. His initial offer from Lions' GM Wally Buono was less than \$100,000. That's



JOHN MAHONEY GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Defensive-end Aaron Hunt is a two-time CFL all-star, including last season, when he had seven quarterback sacks.

because Buono felt compelled to increase his offer to fellow defensive-tackle Khalif Mitchell. B.C. then became active in free agency, signing defensive-backs Lin-J Shell and Byron Parker, along with fullback Stu Foord.

Hamilton last week also expressed an interest in Hunt. But the Tiger-Cats then went out and signed receiver Andy Fantuz from Saskatchewan, considered this year's prime free-agent acquisition. Hamilton also added linebacker Kevin Eiben, defensive-end Greg Peach and offensive-lineman Tim O'Neill.

With the cupboard now bare in B.C. and Hamilton – and the Lions already telling Hunt he would have a reduced role there next season – Hunt's options were somewhat more limited.

This isn't to suggest he won't be welcomed, and wanted, in Montreal, where he can have an immediate effect on the team's rebuilt defensive line. Indeed, Hunt heard from Mike Sinclair, the Als' defensive-line coach, last week following the release of veteran defensive-tackle Eric

Wilson. And Hunt will face weaker offensive lines in the East Division.

With the releases of Wilson, Jeff Robertshaw and rush-end Anwar Stewart, combined with the supposed reluctance of free-agent Jermaine McElveen to return, the Als will have a different appearance up front on defence. And that might be a welcome sight, considering the Als' run defence surrendered 161 yards and four touchdowns in its playoff loss to Hamilton. But that same run defence was strong throughout the regular season, allowing a league-low average of 92.4 yards.

The Als last week added free-agent linebacker Rod Davis from Edmonton. Entering free agency, Popp expressed a desire to add a defensive back. Still remaining on the market are Hamilton's Jason Shivers, Calgary's Brandon Isaac, Saskatchewan's Leron Mitchell and B.C.'s Tad Kornegay.

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