

The 'Father of Maritime Football'

For his many achievements, the all-star CFL centre has been inducted into five sports halls of fame

BY ALLISON LAWLOR, HALIFAX

From his hospital bed in the tiny community of Sherbrooke, N.S., Don Loney took a call from the Hamilton Tiger-Cats' defensive front coach Dennis McPhee.

The Ticats' season opener was on television and Mr. McPhee wanted his old friend to watch the game. Mr. Loney turned on his set and saw the Canadian Football League team post a 38-36 victory over the B.C. Lions at BC Place Stadium. He died the next day. For the man who became known as the "Father of Maritime Football," it was a fitting way to spend his final hours.

Mr. Loney, who died last month at the age of 80, made a lasting mark as one of the country's top university coaches with the St. Francis Xavier University X-Men. As coach of the team from 1957 until 1973, his X-Men had a 133-31-2 record. His teams from Antigonish, N.S., won nine conference titles, four Atlantic Bowls and the 1966 College Bowl title. During that era, *Time* magazine called the X-Men "assassins from the East" and the university "Little Notre Dame." Mr. Loney was also a driving force behind the Atlantic Bowl game, which made its debut in 1956.

"It was more than just about football, it was about moulding the young men," said Bill Kiely, president of St. Francis Xavier's alumni association.

"Discipline was front and centre (for Don)," he said. "He didn't like anything half done. He instilled that in his players."

The son of a locomotive engineer on the Canadian National Railway, Mr. Loney was born on Nov. 16, 1923, in Ottawa. He was the second of three children born to Florence and Joe Loney. When he was 13, the family moved to Montreal. It was the Depression years and the Loney family lived in a third-floor flat not far from the railroad terminal.

By the time he reached high school, Mr. Loney was playing football. After graduation, he played centre with the Montreal Pats, a junior football team.

The war called and in 1943, Mr. Loney joined the Royal Canadian Navy (Reserve) as an ordinary seaman. The following year he was



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posted to one of the coastal patrol vessels and then to the Canadian 65th Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla in England. Shortly after he arrived in England, the war ended and he was sent back to Canada.

After the war, the six-foot, 200-pound centre played with the Montreal Hornets for a year and then headed south to North Carolina State College on a football scholarship. Homesick, he returned home a year later and went to Toronto to play for the Argonauts, helping the team to win the Grey Cup in 1946.

That same year he was named all-star centre, an honour he won three more times. In 1950, he won the Jeff Russell Trophy for most valuable player in the eastern conference while playing with the Ottawa Rough Riders. The following year he won the Grey Cup with the team.

Unable to make enough money to live playing football in those days, Mr. Loney found work as a tax assessor and a dairy sales promoter to supplement his income. He also joined the naval reserve. In 1953, he accepted a tour of duty at the diving

school at HMCS Stadacona in Halifax and coached the Stadacona Sailors football team.

The following year he was offered a contract to play for the Calgary Stampede. Soon after, he injured himself while playing and decided to take a job at the naval air station HMCS Shearwater in Nova Scotia. There he coached the Shearwater Flyers football team for two years.

Mr. Loney's greatest accomplishments came at the intercollegiate level. For 17 years, he coached the

St. Francis Xavier University team. One of his coaching highlights was winning the first College Bowl, which preceded the Vanier Cup, in 1966 at Varsity Stadium in Toronto. Mr. Loney watched as his team from a small Nova Scotian town walked into the stadium and destroyed Waterloo Lutheran (now Wilfrid Laurier), the heavily favoured team.

A tough coach, he demanded high performance from his players both on and off the football field. "If a person does his best, that's what's most important. I can't stand half-assed things," he told *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald* last year.

William Shea, who was captain of the university's team from 1957 until 1959, remembers his former coach as a disciplinarian who also showed compassion for his players. "With everyone he was trying to teach them to be their best," said Dr. Shea, an orthopedic surgeon in Boston.

Dr. Shea also remembers being in the dressing room on Saturday mornings before a big game listening to John Philip Sousa motivational marching songs. Mr. Loney used to play the music loudly in an effort to get the team pumped up.

On the sidelines during practice and at all games, Mr. Loney could be seen chomping on a cigar with his beloved boxer by his side. "When the manager packed the gear box, he always had to include three things — the dog's collar and leash and the coach's cigars," he once told the *Chronicle-Herald*.

Mr. Loney wasn't at his best on game day. "He was very emotional," Dr. Shea said. "He made a lot of noise."

Ahead of his time, Mr. Loney had his practices filmed, which was uncommon in the late 1950s, and also had his students keep stats of tackles, blocks and sacks.

Mr. Loney retired as coach in 1973 but continued to attend St. Francis Xavier team games over the next three decades. He later moved to the small, picturesque community of Sherbrooke where he pursued his love of oil painting. He had a particular fondness for railroads and naval ships and these were often the subjects of his paintings.

For his achievements, Mr. Loney was inducted into five sports halls of fame, including the Canadian, Nova Scotia, St. Francis Xavier, Ottawa and Canadian Forces. Most of his trophies and plaques are now resting at the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame in Halifax. Instead of having them hidden away in a dark attic, he wanted them in a place where they would be appreciated by sports fans.

Mr. Loney, who remained a bachelor all his life, died on June 19,

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