



The CFL ILLUSTRATED *Interview*

It's doubtful Johnny Rodgers will ever erase his famous, misconstrued, "ordinary super-star" remark, but he could very well make it stand as a testimonial to foresight. After a year where he openly complained about not receiving enough work, he was good enough to win the Schenley Award as the CFL's top rookie. No one can deny that Rodgers is one of the most exciting players in the game

today, nor can anyone dispute the fact that what he's shown may only be the tip of the iceberg, his talents have not yet been completely revealed.

But as he admits, the game of football is a team sport and right or wrong, somebody has to be in charge. Last year Marv Levy decided that Rodgers would not get the ball on every play, or every second play, as he had done many

times at the University of Nebraska where he was the eventual Heisman Trophy winner in 1972. To be a football player like Johnny Rodgers you have to have confidence, super confidence in your ability to perform and deliver and, while many things have taken place in his life to shake that confidence, he has survived, being no less than an ordinary super-star.

continued

RODGERS:

CFLI — Go back to when you originally signed with the Montreal Alouettes. Was there any negative reaction from your family, friends, or teammates about going to Canada?

RODGERS — Well, I didn't get any negative reaction as far as my family was concerned. I've been more or less chosen to lead the family since I went to college and I've had to make my own decisions. I've tried to make the kind of decisions that would be best for myself and good for my family as well. So they put a lot of trust in me as far as the decision was concerned. I did get a considerable amount of feedback from the people around us, from Nebraska, and my friends about going to Canadian football. A lot of them felt that they wanted me to go to the NFL, for selfish reasons, so they could

see me play. When they found out later that they would be able to see me play from Canada, that was O.K. I even had some people from Nebraska come up here to see games. But when you grow up as an American boy I think it's your biggest dream to be playing in the National Football League one day, so their reaction was normal. It was during my second year in college, that I knew I was on the Canadian negotiation list. Up until then I had never even thought about Canadian football. I remember Harland Savare, of the San Diego Chargers, stated he didn't even give it a thought that I was seriously considering going to the CFL. He said there was no prestige for me to gain by doing this and he couldn't really see it. But I thought it was an opportune time and, overall, I felt I was really doing the best thing for myself, and my family thought so too. It seems I made

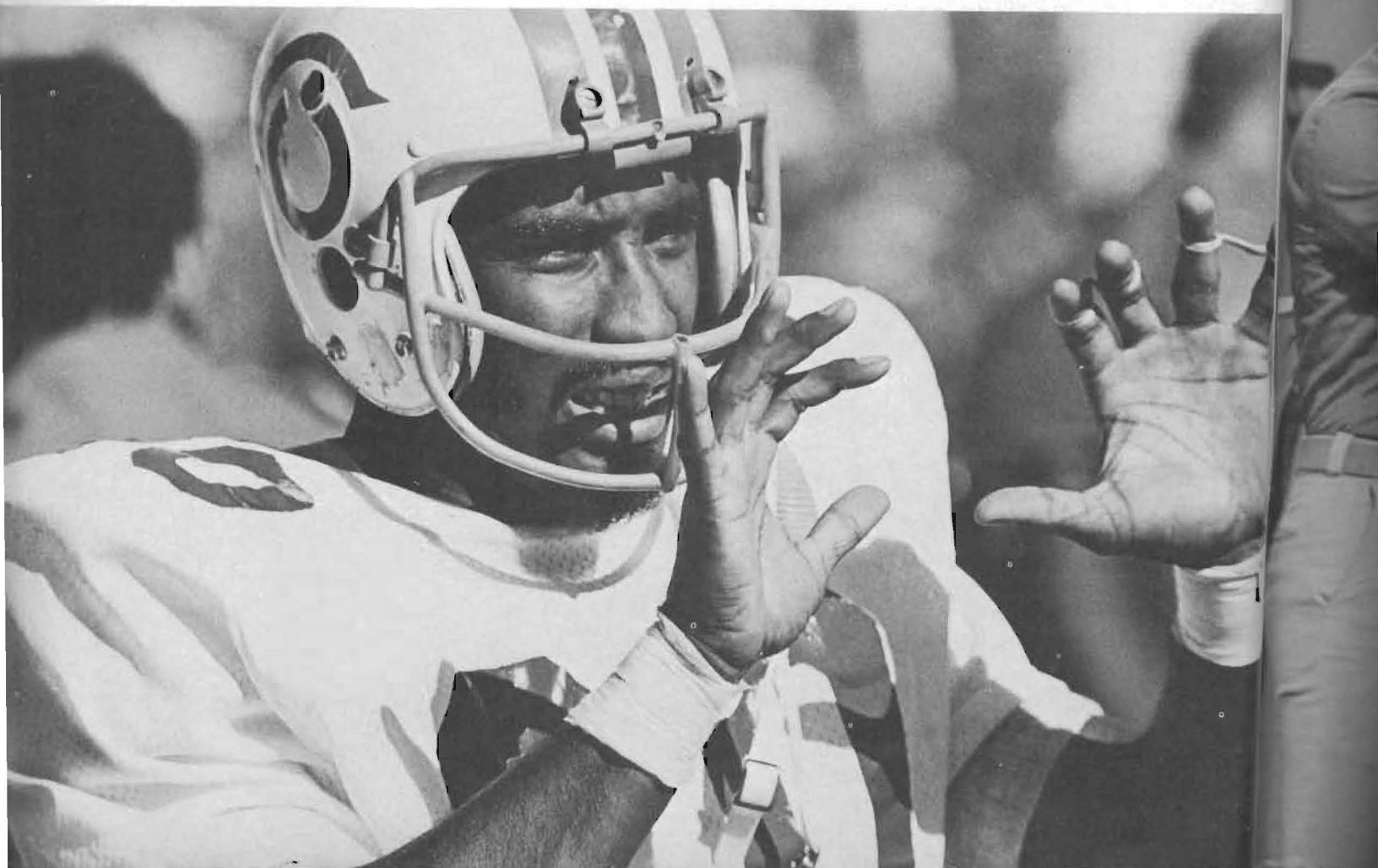
a fairly intelligent decision, when you take a look at what happened at San Diego.

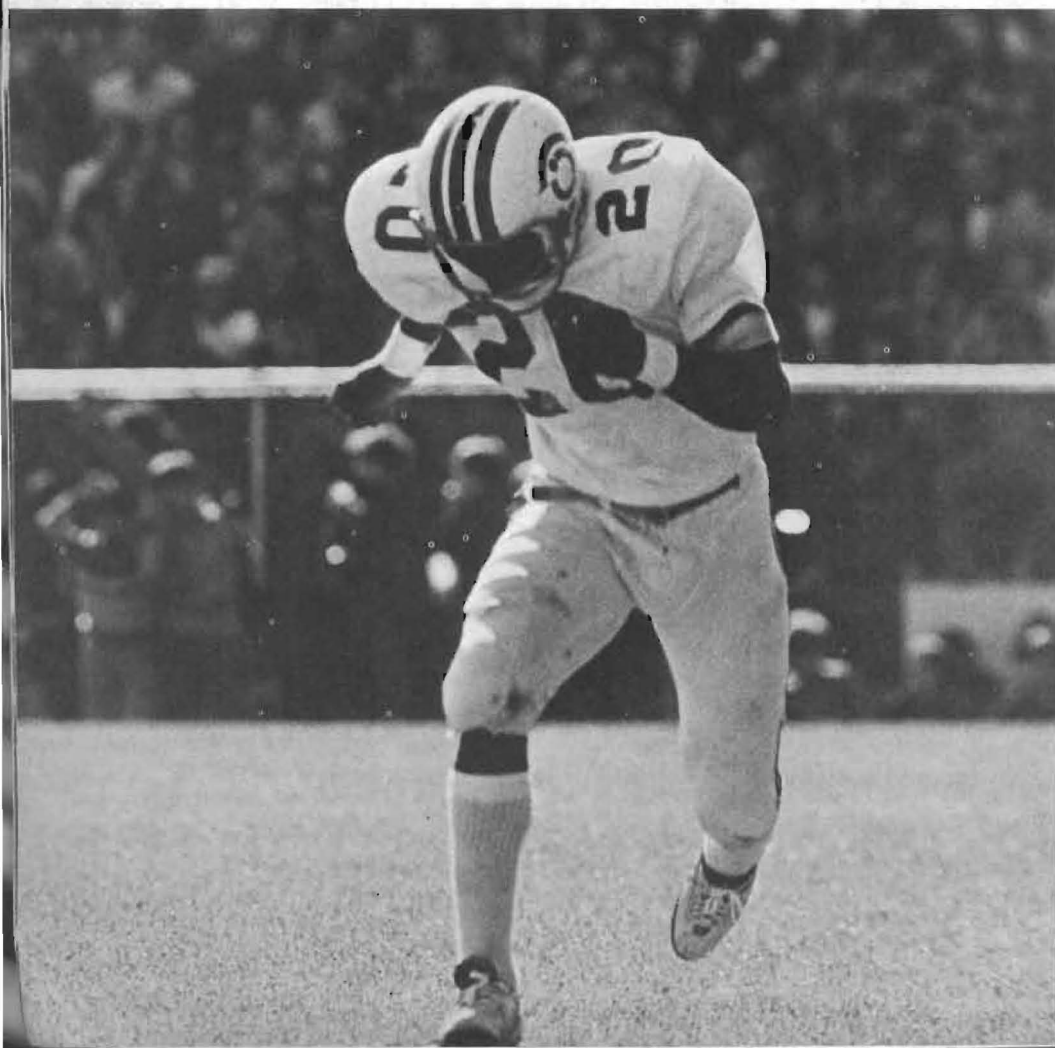
CFLI — Do you recall after you signed with Montreal if there was a tendency by the NFL people, who were interested in you prior to the announcement, to play down your abilities?

"When I'm playing I don't go much for names and I don't remember them as well as I remember numbers."

RODGERS — Yes. I don't really know where those kind of remarks started but, yes, they did play my abilities down. It was said that I didn't go to the NFL because I was too small, that I might not be able to make it. It was said I wasn't

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RODGERS:

quick enough, or I wasn't fast enough, anything except the fact that I just decided not to play in the National Football League. While the same people say that they thought that I really couldn't have made it in the NFL they forget about my good friend, Greg Pruitt, from Oklahoma who does fairly well in the NFL and he was second in the Heisman Trophy the year I won. I always tell Greg that he was number two and, that if number two made it, then you know that number one would make it.

CFLI — Do you feel this negative reaction, although it's well behind you now, was dispelled by the fact that you won the Schenley Award as the best rookie in the CFL?

RODGERS — Well, I think that the Schenley helps but it's just that many times people figure that the National Football League is the father of football. They don't realize that there's a lot of prestige in the Canadian Football League as well. Some of the prominent people who play in the Canadian Football League have played in the NFL and came here, and some of them return to the NFL. We know that we have good competition. And I think it gives me more credibility. But they still say they would wonder whether I would have won the rookie award if I was in the NFL. It would have been a more difficult thing to do but it would have been something I would have made up my mind to strive for. I had so many setbacks as far as winning the Heisman was concerned that I felt I still had to prove myself my first year as a pro. Just like I feel I have to do a lot of things this season to show that I deserved the rookie award last year.

CFLI — In the 1973 Eastern scoring statistics, there are four place kickers who led the scoring followed by Garney Henley, Johnny Rodgers and Bill Symons. Symons and yourself were tied with forty-two points. Do you feel in this day and age of the place kicker, that maybe possibly there should be a separate trophy, one for the kickers, and one for the people that have to lug the ball?

Rogers runs pass pattern against Ottawa's Al Marcelin. Two speedsters at work.

RODGERS — Yes, I really think they should have different categories. It's an altogether different type of job. Kicking is accuracy and one's ability to concentrate. As far as carrying the ball into the end zone, it's a different world. You can always rely on having lots of company when you try to drive over their goal line.

CFLI — Its been said that you didn't get enough work in 1973. Will there be plans to change it this year?

RODGERS — Yes, I certainly hope so. I got together with coach Levy last year and we agreed that in order to use my ability, that I would probably get the ball more and I'm really looking forward to it. After all, I train all week to get into condition to carry the ball and when I don't, it seems a waste.

CFLI — When you didn't get the ball, did you get discouraged at any time?

RODGERS — Well, I never got discouraged but there were times when I was very depressed and didn't really know what I would have to do to get the ball, or what I was doing wrong. But this is a team game and we have to play the way coaches have outlined. The only thing I try to do is to keep myself ready for the time when I get the ball, so I will be as effective as possible.

CFLI — You said that you trained all week and you didn't get to use any of this conditioning. Would you expand on that?

RODGERS — Ever since I was a kid I have been conditioning myself to play the entire game. Sometimes I did. At Nebraska there were games when I played as much as 45 minutes. I really need the work. I don't feel like I'm in the game until such time as I have carried the ball, or blocked, or tackled, or did whatever it was to use my abilities to the fullest. I know that I used to go home from games where I had played well, and long, battered, bruised and aching all over, and I was convinced that was the way I should feel, that's what I was getting prepared for, so when the time came to play 45 minutes then I was in condition to do it. I didn't go home that way very often last year.

CFLI — Being a very fast receiver it's almost a foregone conclusion you would be covered by

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RODGERS:

the fastest pass defender. Who do you recall as being the toughest defensive back to work against?

RODGERS — Well, when I'm playing I don't go much for names and I don't remember them as well as I remember numbers, so if I come up with numbers and not the names it's not because I don't recognize their talents. I would have to say that the toughest defender, for me, is number 13 in

Edmonton.

CFLI — Larry Highbaugh.

RODGERS — That's right, Highbaugh.

CFLI — Because of his speed?

RODGERS — Well, he's very fast but it's more his quickness. I can beat him one on one, but at the time the quarterback releases the ball and it's on its way to me, he's able to turn, recover, and arrive about the same time. Rather than speed I think it's more quickness

and agility that makes him such a good pass defender.

CFLI — Is there anybody in the East that you found difficult to work against?

RODGERS — Well the Toronto defense is quite good and I remember the corner back, number 14, I believe.

CFLI — Dave Raimey.

RODGERS — Raimey and another fellow, 26.

CFLI — Tim Anderson.

RODGERS — Yeah, that's it, Anderson and Raimey are very good. But rather than quickness, it's experience that helps them.

CFLI — In every sport there are athletes that have characteristics that are easily recognizable to the public. For instance, Ken Dryden leaning on his goal stick, or Arnold Palmer hitching up his golf slacks, but we have also found that Johnny Rodgers has a trademark. We have received photographs from almost every photographer in the CFL showing Johnny Rodgers on the sidelines sitting on his helmet. When did you start this habit?

RODGERS — I don't know when I started it originally, but by the time I got into college ball I was doing it all the time. I guess the reason is that I just can't get comfortable on one knee or the other, or sitting on the bench. I was told it was against the rules because I would break the helmet. This may have been true for some of the bigger players but since I'm not that big, or heavy, I continued to do it and they continued to tell me not to do it. I suppose they finally got tired of warning me all the time and nobody said anything more. I know they felt it was a discipline problem, that if Johnny Rodgers could do it what would stop the other players from doing it. However, the habit won out in the end and I've been doing it ever since.

CFLI — In summation, Johnny Rodgers is looking forward to more work for this season and, if what you say is true, looking forward to going home after the game battered, bruised, and aching all over.

RODGERS — Well, I would rather have that than go home feeling I had missed the game. I'm looking forward to a great season in Montreal to show that winning the Schenley Rookie Award was no fluke. ●

A brief rest on a helmet, a throwback to college days.

