

When it comes to Canada's national pro football championship there's nobody more familiar with Grey Cup games than Hamilton Tiger-Cat trainer Jimmy (The Rooster) Simpson.

Man and boy — and after 65-or-so years, there's plenty of boy left in Simpson — Jimmy has been in 19 dominion finals as player, official and trainer.

That record alone should qualify Simpson for overdue entry in the Canadian Football Hall of Fame.

He would like to have made it an even 20 this year but fortune overlooked Simpson and the third-place Ticats.

Curses finalists

So he'll settle for the television version this time around, cigar and whiskey close at hand, chomping at the bit and likely cursing out the non-Hamilton "bums" who got lucky and made the grade in Vancouver's Empire Stadium.

Accordingly, with Tiger-Cats watching from the sidelines this year, some Grey Cup memories from Simpson should perk up the pride of Hamilton football fans.

The Tigers, Wildcats and Tiger-Cats haven't exactly been ignored in Grey Cup annals. Winning football, playoff football and championship football are — certainly were — a Hamilton tradition. Jimmy Simpson has been part of it for 47 years.

In fighting trim at five-feet-six and 136 pounds, Jimmy broke into football as an outside wing with the 1928 Tigers. Since then, he's been involved in six Grey Cup games as a player, three as an official and 10 as a trainer.

Simpson is one of few players in Canadian football to score four touchdowns in Grey Cup games, a feat he shares with Johnny Bright, Ross Craig, Jackie Parker and Charley Shepard. Only Prince Hal Patterson — with five TDs in national finals — overshadows that mark.

Scored twice

Simpson scored his first two within three months of his football debut. That was with the 1928 Tigers under coach Mike Rodden who blanked Regina 30-0 at the Hamilton Amateur Athletic Association grounds in the city's west end.

"That was a cold, blistery December day," Simpson recalls. "Brian Timmis foot two touchdowns and so did I. I dribbled a loose ball about 40 yards and fell on it in the end zone for one touchdown. I took a long, overhand lateral from Pep Leadlay for the other.

"Outside wing was the end of that time. You played both ways unless you were hurt. Teams carried a roster of 20 during the schedule but could only dress 18 for the Grey Cup game. Speed and tackling were the big things then. You didn't have 260-pounders blocking you.

No hoopla

"There wasn't the Grey Cup hoopla of today but it was still west against the east. The city of Hamilton gave both teams a dinner in the Royal Connaught Hotel and the winners got a crest.

"Bui the Tigers in those days gave additional awards. If it was your first year on a winning team, you got a ring; the second year, a wristwatch; third year, a set of flatware; fourth year, a tea service; fifth year, a spinnet desk; sixth year, you got whatever. I think Brian Timmis picked out a dining room suite."

The next year — 1929 — the Tigers and Regina went back at it again, Hamilton winning 14-3, and Simpson got another touchdown, taking a handoff for an end run.

That was also the game Simpson and Huck Welch almost combined to make Grey Cup history with the first touchdown off a forward pass.

Though it hadn't been used in the east that year, the pass had been employed in the west. Both teams agreed to use it in the final, on condition the pass

was completed between the 25-yard lines.

"I caught a pass from Huck and went for the touchdown. I knew I was outside the 25 yard line but the referee from the west said I was inside. So the score didn't count."

In 1932, the Tigers met Regina again, with Hamilton victorious 25-6. Simpson returned a fumble 40 yards for his fourth Grey Cup touchdown.

Then came 1935, the year Winnipeg Blue Bombers and Fritz Hanson took the Grey Cup home for the first time, defeating the Tigers 18-12.

Tigers ran into a fallow period ("the team got old and they all quit together") for a number of years and Simpson quit

The Big Four disbanded during the Second World War but Hamilton football fortunes rested with the Wildcats of the ORFU.

In 1943, Brian Timmis asked Simpson to help coach the Wildcats.

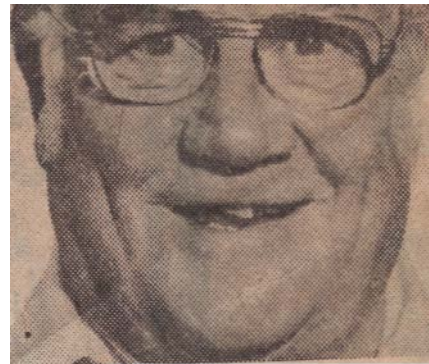
Played instead

"Hell, I can do better than that I'll get myself into shape and play," said Jimmy.

He did and the Wildcats beat Winnipeg RCAF Bombers 23-14 for the Canadian Football Championship. A year later, they lost 7-6 to HMCS Donnacona of St. Hyacinthe.

From 1945 to 1956, Simpson returned to officiating, working as an umpire in the first festivity-filled Grey Cup of 1948 when Calgary beat Ottawa 12-7, the 1949 Montreal win over Calgary 28-15, and the 1955 Edmonton win over Montreal, 34-19.

In 1957, Simpson accepted an offer from Tiger-Cat general manager Jake Gaudaur to be assistant trainer to Pinky Lewis. Thus began Simpson's 10 trips to the Grey Cup from the sidelines.



JIMMY SIMPSON
47 years in football

Hamilton beat Winnipeg 32-7 that year. In the 1958 final, Winnipeg turned the tables, 35-28.

In 1959, Ticats and Winnipeg met for the third consecutive year with the Blue Bombers winning 21-7.

Hamilton was back in 1961, again against the Bombers, but Winnipeg's Kenny Ploen ran for a touchdown in overtime for a 21-14 victory.

The same teams met in 1962's famous Fog Bowl. Winnipeg led 28-27 with nine minutes to 20 when the game was called and the remaining time played the next day with no change in score.

Out of 19 Grey Cups, does Simpson have any favorites?

"I feel the most excitement about my very first one in 1928. "But the best Grey Cup I've ever seen was probably 1958 when Winnipeg beat us 35-28. That was a heck of a football game, long before defence dominated offence."

