

Jimmy Simpson

By GORD WALKER
Globe and Mail Reporter

HAMILTON - The first league game of football in which Jimmy Simpson played was as a member of Hamilton Tigers against Toronto Argonauts.

"They had a big end named Hutchinson and he popped me twice," Simpson recalled yesterday. "I came out of that game with two real beautiful black eyes."

That was in 1928 and the 5 foot 6 inch 135-pounder, who scored two touchdowns while playing 60 minutes of the Grey Cup game that year, is now a 190-pound trainer for his beloved Hamilton football team. But he is still 5 feet 6 inches tall.

In the intervening 40 years Jimmy Simpson has participated in 17 Grey Cup games as a player, official, assistant trainer and head trainer.

Things are never dull when Jimmy Simpson is around. He never walks—he struts. Ellison Kelly tagged him Rooster and that is the name he gets in the dressing room.

At least once a year Kelly needles Simpson into a display of belligerence. Kelly, a gentle giant who was heavyweight boxing champ at Michigan State stands 9 inches taller and is 65 pounds heavier than his adversary.

What happens?

"Oh," shrugs Simpson, "he picks me up, usually with one hand and dumps me in the waste basket."

He wasn't always that lucky with his opponents.

When he was embarking on his 11th playing season with the Tigers in 1938, the Big Four team was scrimmaging against the Tiger Cubs of the ORFU. On a punt play, Simpson was detained at the line of scrimmage by a rookie who held his sweater.

"A kid named Pickles Southwick, it was. I said to him: 'No punk grabs hold of me' and I laid one on his jaw. Then I continued downfield to join the play. When it was over I turned around and there's Pickles. He says: 'No big shot punches me' and he laid a dandy on me. Broke my jaw in four places."

"We became very good friends after that, but I was in hospital a week and developed osteomyelitis in my jaw. I got out of hospital just before Christmas, but I couldn't eat turkey. I couldn't eat

anything solid for at least another month."

That seemed to be the end of his playing career. He missed the 1938 season and when he turned up next year the club insisted he undergo a tough medical. He didn't pass and officials said they wouldn't let him play, for his own safety.

After five years out of uniform, during which time he coached a junior team and embarked on his officiating career, he made a startling comeback at age of 37.

"I met Brian Timmis on the street one day and he asked 'h' to give up officiating and help* him coach the Flying Wildcats. Well, I'd kept in pretty good shape so I said: 'Brian, I'll do better than that—I'll play for you.'"

He played, and played well. He was elected captain of the team, made all-Canadian that season and ran his string of Grey-Cup-winning teams to four. His earlier championship teams were in 1928, 1929 and 1932. He missed in 1935 and 1944.

Simpson cheerfully admits he talks too much. "I'm as mouthy now as I was then."

His mouth and feet got him into football in the first place.

"I used to play baseball for Moody Tigers, and some of the other guys, Glenn Small, Jackie Baker and Earl Charters had played on the 1927 football team. They kept saying they'd kick some of the cockiness out of me if I went out for football. How can you turn down a challenge like that?"

The Tigers opened the season with a picnic for the players at the old HAAA grounds. On the program was a race—100 yards. Jimmy finished first and coach Mike Rodden asked him what position he played.

"I'd never played football in my life, but I told him I was an end, so he called Cap Fear over and said: 'Here Cap—here's a pupil for you.' Cap made me do everything the way he did it. I got so I ran the same way he did."

"I remember that first game against Argos," said Simpson. "After the game Cap Fear looked at the eyes Hutchinson had blackened and he said: 'Let that be a lesson. From now on, you hit them first—make them respect you.' In those days the referees were pretty good. If you got popped, they gave you a chance to pop back."

He tried to follow that philosophy as a game official and, sure enough, it worked — he got popped, by a player.

"It was the last game of the 1950 season—Montreal at Toronto. Frank Filchok was quarterback for Montreal and he called a field goal try by Nick Scollard from about the 15. The kick was blocked but Filchok recovered the ball and threw a pass—for a completion. Seymour ruled it an illegal pass and that started the fuss."

"Mr. (Billy) Foulds came down from the stands. First he backed Seymour, then he switched around, then he came back again and finally said it was the right decision. Scollard was the same kind of guy I was — mouthy—and I finally asked Seymour to get him out of my hair. Seymour gave him a 15-yard penalty and a little later I called him for no-yards. While I had my arms folded to signal the play, he laid one on the point of my jaw."

Scollard didn't hit as hard as Pickles Southwick had 12 years earlier. Four stitches was the damage and Simpson even asked for leniency when Scollard was threatened with life expulsion. He suggested a fine and reprimand would be sufficient penalty.

"My philosophy in life is that it's far easier to do a guy a good turn than it is to do a bad one."

That philosophy eventually got him into trouble as an official. In a game at Varsity Stadium in 1956 Argos' Al Pfeifer took exception to a ruling by Simpson that he hadn't legally caught a pass. It was obvious at the time that Simpson's decision was correct.

Pfeifer first bumped Simpson, then challenged him, and Jimmy recommended to referee Harry Bowden that the player be thrown out of the game. Bowden ordered Pfeifer out, at which point the Argo star suddenly realized the enormity of his performance.

"He almost had tears in his eyes. His mother and dad and other relatives had come to Toronto particularly to see him play. I knew what he was going through so I said if it was all right with the referee, I wouldn't insist he leave. So he was allowed to continue."

Strangely, an Argonaut official created such a big fuss because an expelled player was allowed to continue that Simpson was suspended.

The little pepperpot dies a little bit when his Tiger-Cats lose. He takes defeat hard, snarls at players and friends until he emerges from the dark mood.

He is probably the only trainer who ever was notified twice by Commissioner Syd Halter that his conduct on the sidelines was objectionable. The second notification carries the information that if a third warning were necessary, Hamilton would have to locate a new trainer.

He is undoubtedly the only trainer who holds his own kind of press conference after games. He supplies medicinal prescriptions for people he likes, after the players have departed. It's a pleasant little party—if the Tiger-Cats have won the game.

Born James Newlands Simpson on Nov. 1, 1906, the Ticat trainer has been a Hamiltonian all his life and he wouldn't want to be anything else. He was married in 1935. His wife Alma died in 1936, four days after Jimmy Jr., was born.

Young Jimmy attended University of Michigan on a track scholarship and is now head of the physical education department at Hamilton's Winston Churchill Secondary School.