

SPOTLIGHT Talented receiver has recovered from stress fracture in his right foot and is determined to fulfill potential he displayed during breakout 2005 season

Stala steps back into Als lineup

HERB ZURKOWSKY THE GAZETTE
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Dave Stala, who makes his living playing professional football, has defended his decision to wear soccer cleats – although the choice of footwear might have played a part in an injury that forced him to miss more than one-third of the Canadian Football League season.

Stala, the Alouettes' veteran slotback, suffered a stress fracture in his right foot during training camp, which forced him to miss Montreal's first seven games. But Stala is expected to make his 2007 debut on Saturday, at home, against the Hamilton Tiger-Cats.

When he takes to the field at Molson Stadium, he will be wearing football shoes with thicker soles.

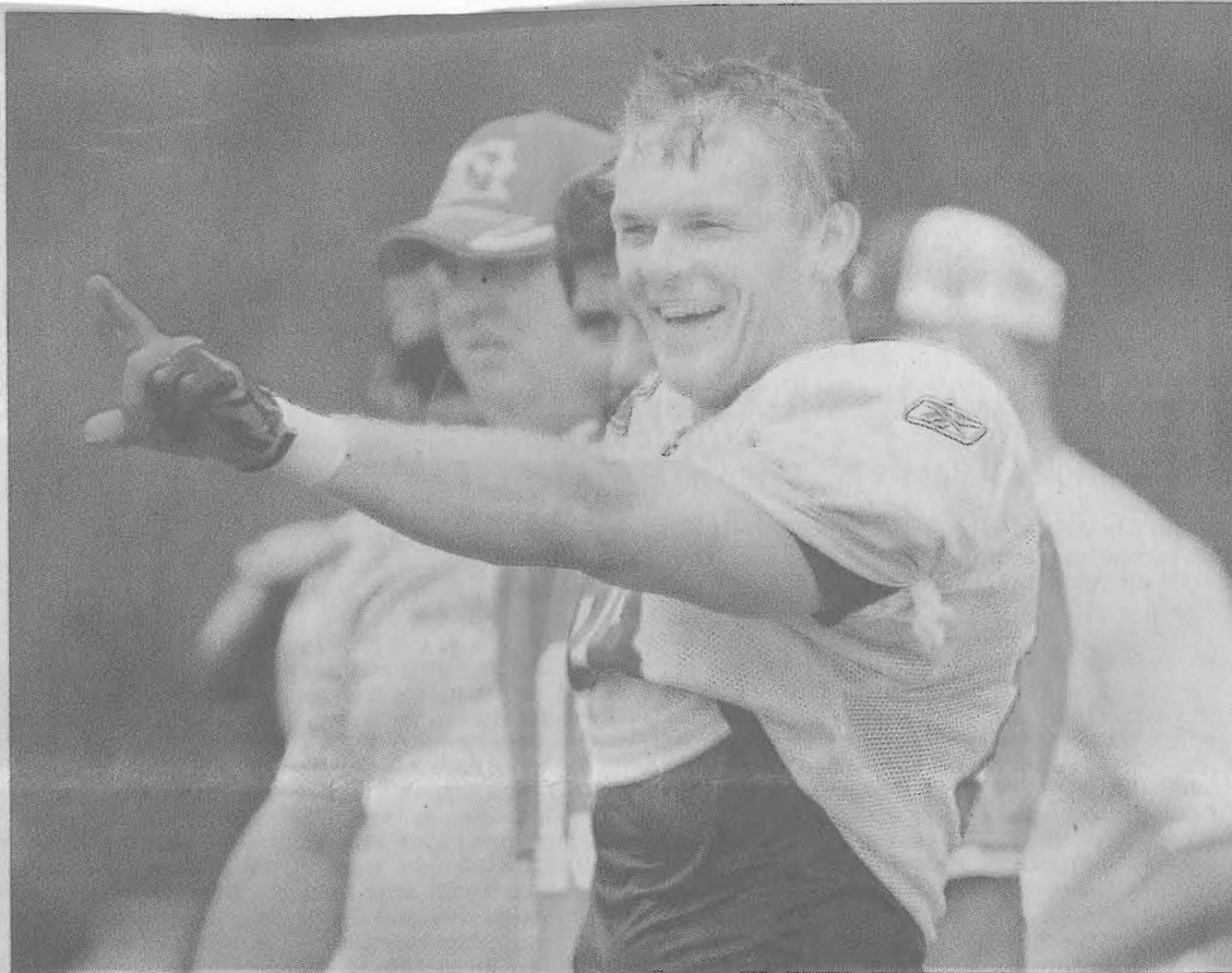
"I had been wearing the same shoes since 2004," he revealed. "It's an injury that just occurred over time. A hairline fracture became a stress fracture.

"Why soccer shoes? Listen, I'm the backup kicker and they're more comfortable on your feet. Next year, I'll probably go back to soccer shoes."

Nonetheless, the word around the Fort St. Jean campus in June, when Stala sustained the injury, was that he was wearing improper footwear that couldn't handle the cutting required of a receiver running repeated patterns. Stala dismissed the claim as an unproven rumour. And truth be told, he's not the only Als receiver wearing soccer shoes.

Not as easily overlooked, however, is Stala's recent trend for sustaining injuries. Or the fact he has failed to fulfill the potential he displayed in 2005, when he recorded his only 1,000-yard season. That was also the only season in Stala's five-year career he dressed for all 18 regular-season games.

"We're disappointed by the simple fact we know what he's capable of, and he hasn't been able to stay on that same level," general manager/head coach Jim Popp said. "We can't control injuries. But when players aren't on the field consistently, they have trouble feeling good about themselves. They push too hard, because they think



JOHN KENNEY GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Because of a series of nagging injuries, Als' Dave Stala has played a full slate of games only once during his five-year career.

they're going to lose their job. And they know they will if they don't get on the field.

"I've got a lot of confidence in Dave. He's one of our better athletes. If he stays healthy, he will be that (1,000-yard) receiver."

Stala missed the start of last season with a hamstring injury and never was himself, catching a modest 38 passes for

445 yards along with two touchdowns. In 2004, he was limited to nine games by a variety of injuries. If he's not careful, the 6-foot-2, 205-pounder will be tagged with an injury-prone moniker, much as Sylvain Girard was throughout his career.

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 THAT TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

STALA

'Injuries are part of the game'

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"I won't say I've been injured a lot," Stala said. "I've been out with a lot of small things, but you're right, I've had a few injuries. At least they were nothing serious. Nagging injuries are a pain in the butt, but you have to live with it. It's nothing you can control. Injuries are part of the game. It depends how people look at it.

"We all get hurt. It's how you deal and rebound from it. I was very frustrated, but you can't get down on yourself and give yourself grief. You've got to go out and keep your head up."

Long considered the heir apparent to Ben Cahoon, the Als still are waiting for Stala to reach his potential. But management has remained remark-

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ALS SLOTBACK DAVE STALA

ably patient with the 27-year-old. Stala, a potential free agent, was one of numerous veterans re-signed to new deals during Grey Cup week last season. Stala, according to a source, received a signing bonus of about \$50,000 — money that didn't count toward this season's salary cap.

He has been on the field only once this season, dropping repeated passes in last June's opening exhibition game at Toronto. That was more than two months ago, and it will be interesting to see how Stala rebounds against the Ticats.

"When my number's called, I've got to make plays. I can't have mess-ups and drops," he admitted. "I have to get my first catch and go from there. Definitely, I need that first catch early."

hzurkowsky@
thegazette.canwest.com