

# 'It's time to turn a chapter'

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There were no tears and, given the fact he lives several hours away, no official sendoff with a news conference.

Instead, former Alouettes defensive-tackle Eric Wilson was going to celebrate his retirement with a rare night out - dinner with his wife, capped off with a cigar - a treat when there's a 2-year-old daughter at home.

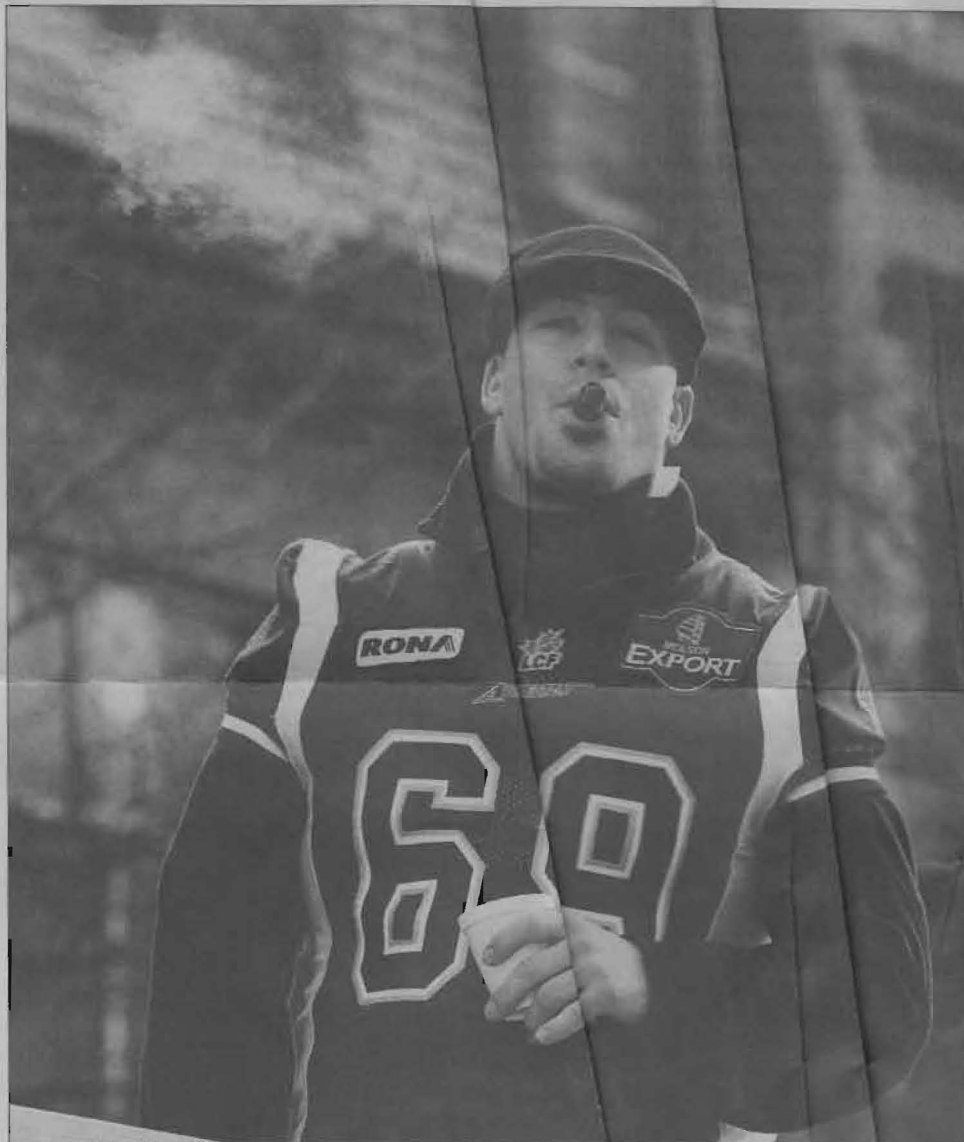
"I'm happy and sad, but it's time to turn a chapter," Wilson, 34, told The Gazette Tuesday night from Westchester, N.Y. "This is part of the game and it has to be done. As a pro, you know it's coming."

The Als issued a release, late Tuesday afternoon, officially announcing Wilson's retirement. Wilson said he requested his release last winter, after he was approached to renegotiate and when it became apparent he might no longer fit in the team's plans. The Als confirmed his release on Feb. 14, and Wilson spoke to The Gazette a month later - his first public comments.

Wilson and his agent, Paul Sheehy, scouted out potential job opportunities in the Canadian Football League, talking to Hamilton and Toronto. Neither team was prepared to make a firm commitment, so Wilson contacted Montreal general manager Jim Popp, informing him he wanted to retire an Alouette.

Wilson spent eight seasons in the CFL - the final five with the Als. He had 54 defensive tackles and five quarterback sacks with Montreal, signing with the Als as a free agent in 2007.

Wilson broke into the CFL with Winnipeg, in 2002. He was traded to Saskatchewan just before training camp in '07. Indeed, Wilson was in Chicago, driving to Winnipeg from his father's Michigan



JOHN MAHOEY GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

"In June, when I don't have 30 pounds of pads and am not sweating, it'll sink in. This is the end of it," says Eric Wilson, enjoying a cigar during the 2011 Grey Cup parade in Montreal.

home, when he learned of the deal - a day before training camp. He refused to report to the Roughriders, was suspended and eventually released, then quickly snatched by the Als, who converted him to a defensive lineman.

Wilson was a guard at Winnipeg and with the Miami Dolphins. When he returned to the Blue Bombers in 2006, he moved to tackle. He'll be remembered as one of the

few CFL players - and among the most recent - to start on both offence and defence.

"I'll take that trade (going to Montreal instead of Saskatchewan) any time," said Wilson, who captured consecutive Grey Cups with the Als in 2009-10. I never played for the stats. My passion was playing the greatest game on Earth. I'm blessed to be retiring having suffered only minor injuries.

"Jim Popp gave me the ability to come to Montreal and (head coach) Marc Trestman is an unbelievable coach," added Wilson who also lauded Mike Sitar, the Als' defensive-line coach.

Like many Montreal defenders, last season was bittersweet for Wilson. The Als' defence struggled, in part due to any injuries, especially the secondary. But the team also had diffi-

culty on second down. The Als played a zone defence primarily under former defensive coordinator Tim Tibesar, who's now at Purdue. Opposing teams were able to complete passes, and sustain drives, by methodically moving downfield.

At the same time, the Als failed to record a sack over the final four games, including their double-overtime loss at home in the East Division semifinal, against the Tigr-Cats. Wilson dressed for 17 regular-season games, including 14 starts. He had 12 tackles and one sack, recording stats in 10 of his games. He also recovered a fumble, had one tackle for a loss and knocked down one pass.

"I never played the game for stats," he said. "I bounced between offence and defence, always doing what the coach asked. That was my whole mentality."

"It seems like anyone over 28 or who has played six or eight years, they're retiring or being released," Wilson added. "It's a weird year. But the whole thing was done in a professional manner. I wasn't crewed or scrutinized. Could I play another year? Probably."

Wilson has some irons in the fire, although unsure of his next move. He has applied for a salesman's position with the General Cigar Co. and, in mid-June, returns to his alma mater, Michigan, to assist in a football camp. He might also handle some recruiting for his agent. And Wilson's looking forward to his first summer home.

"Don't understand what it is yet" he admitted. "In June, when I don't have 30 pounds of pads and am not sweating, it'll sink in. This is the end of it."

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