

Reinebold earns praise

'He knows his stuff and is a smart man,'
former Bomber punter Cameron says

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Before Jeff Reinebold's first game as head coach of the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, he showed up on the field for the pre-game warmup wearing flip-flops and cut-off jeans.

When it came to style, Reinebold was pure genius. He drove a Harley-Davidson motorcycle and had earrings in both ears. He played Bob Marley over the loudspeakers and had a personal trainer teaching him how to box. Problem was, most of the lessons took place in the dressing room, while players were getting taped for practice. Yeah, he crossed the line, but it also was his first head-coaching gig. And he was 40 years old, considered young at the time, given his position.

If the Bombers were seeking a change after getting annihilated 68-7 at Edmonton in the playoffs the year before, there could be no more diametrically opposed personalities than Reinebold, the Bombers' incoming head coach in 1997, and the man he replaced, the paternal Cal Murphy, as old school as they came.

"There was glitz and craziness," said Troy Westwood, Winnipeg's placekicker at the time. "But I remind people, it was accepted and fuelled by the organization. They wanted a fresh dynamic, someone who was new. And they fed it."

"I thought he was spectacular," added Westwood, himself a free spirit during his playing days. "To the very last second, 95 per cent of his players would have jumped on a grenade for him."

The hiring last Friday of Reinebold as the Alouettes' new defensive coordinator remains the talk of the Canadian Football League, at least until free agency begins in a little more than a week. Head

coach Marc Trestman clearly has elected to think outside the box on this one, and people are eagerly waiting to see how Reinebold might transform a Montreal defence that was ravaged by injuries in 2011 and lost its swagger.

Much like anything Trestman tackles, the hiring wasn't done without due diligence on his behalf. A year ago, Daronte' Jones was one of nine people Trestman interviewed for an opening as a defensive backs coach. So you can be sure Trestman did his homework on this one. He's cautiously optimistic Reinebold is what the Als require at this moment, given the circumstances.

"He's unique, loves ball, is intelligent and expresses himself," Trestman told The Gazette on Monday - his first comments since Reinebold's hir-

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ALOUETTES' MARC TRESTMAN

ing was announced. "That's the guy we need for now."

"Every hire is a leap of faith," Trestman said, "but we feel he's worth it. You don't know until the games start, and adversity or success hits. But I like how he interviewed and the reaction I got from people I talked to about his character and love of the game. But it won't mean anything unless he backs it up with science and structure. He's a character person. I hope between the character and teaching that he'll embrace the culture and landscape ... that he'll be unselfish and disciplined."

"I don't want them all the same. I want them moving in

the same direction, but I've always had a staff with different personalities."

Under Reinebold, the Bombers began their 1997 season with two losses, eight defeats in their opening nine games. A desperate Reinebold called on a psychologist, who attempted to hypnotize the entire team. But the losing continued - 14 times in 18 games.

Once, as part of his pre-game speech, Reinebold had the lights turned off in the dressing room, which contained no windows. With Phil Collins's I Can Feel It pumped in, Reinebold ran to the middle of the room, a flashlight stuck to his forehead, and began jumping up and down.

Winnipeg won that night.

"It was all cool. The only problem was we didn't win," said Bob Cameron, the Bombers' punter for more than two decades. "But he was charismatic and fun to be around. It was fun for a year and a half. He made it interesting."

"He made football exciting. I had the best time losing. He made it fun," said Milt Stegall, three seasons into his illustrious career when Reinebold arrived. "Everyday I looked forward to practice. The guy was something else. I enjoyed playing under him. He added excitement."

Reinebold made his share of personnel blunders - remember quarterback T.J. Rubley? - but was loyal to a fault. If he was overwhelmed as a rookie head coach, he won't have those same responsibilities as a coordinator. His former players, to a man, said he'll motivate the Als' defence and put the players in position to succeed.

"He gets a bad rap, but I'll tell you what ... he knows his stuff and is a smart man," Cameron said. "If I was a coach, I'd hire him in a second. I'll be surprised if he doesn't succeed."

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