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David Cranmer

The 1960's have been called by many the "Golden Era" in Canadian professional football. Some of the most exciting players fans ever saw were at their peak in this decade. Russ Jackson, Ron Lancaster, George Reed, Wayne Harris, Terry Evanshen, and Dick Thornton were among the many stars who thrilled fans. This decade also marked an era in which a number of elite Canadian receivers emerged and became household names. One such player was David Cranmer.

Dave Cranmer had starred as a high school athlete in Sarnia, Ontario. He was considered one of the finest high-school football and track and field athletes in that cities' history. In 1964 Dave received a full athletic scholarship from Bowling Green University, in Bowling Green, Ohio. Dave amazed many fans by beating out a number of high school All-American players to win a starting role on the freshman team. Over the next three seasons Dave was a key member of the Bowling Green varsity squad. He developed the reputation of being a skilled receiver with dazzling speed.

In the spring of 1968 both the Cleveland Browns of the NFL and the Ottawa Rough Riders of the CFL were in hot pursuit of Dave. Ottawa eventually won the bidding war for his services. Dave's agent, Alan Eagleson negotiated the most lucrative contract ever given to a Canadian born player in the history of the CFL up to that point. Dave knew he was joining a potential power- house in Ottawa and was thrilled at this opportunity. However he received a shock only days later. In less then a week Ottawa traded him to the Calgary Stampeders! Looking back Dave says,

"They had signed me just to trade me. What an introduction to pro football! But you know what? If I had stayed in Ottawa maybe I would not have even made their team. They were loaded with great receivers like Whit Tucker, Margene Adkins, and Ronnie Stewart. It would have been tough there."

Calgary proved to be an ideal team for Dave's talent. Head Coach Jerry Williams had built a great squad. The Stampeders had one of the toughest defenses in the game and an explosive offense led by quarterback Peter Liske. Dave fit right in! In 1968 lining up at slot-back Dave rushed 140 times for 572 yards, caught 34 passes and

scored 6 touchdowns. He was one of the Stampeders most potent offensive weapons and he confounded opposing defenses with his rushing and receiving abilities. No team in the league successfully shut him down that year. David was named CFL rookie of the year for his performance in 1968. Calgary finished in first place and were strong Grey Cup contenders. In the Western final however, Dave's magical year came to a shattering end. He describes what happened:

"We were playing Saskatchewan, and Pete had just thrown an interception. I was trying to make a tackle on the play and someone rolled into the back of my leg, breaking it. I was carried off the field."

After the game (which Calgary won) Dave was told his lower leg was cracked (as opposed to broken completely) but he still hopes of playing in the Grey Cup against Ottawa. He worked out with the team during Grey Cup week and on Grey Cup Sunday, had his leg frozen and was in uniform ready to go. He knew he could help his team but Coach Jerry Williams had other ideas. Just before game time Williams told Dave he wasn't playing. Dave protested but Coach Williams replied; "Dave your leg is cracked. The Rough Riders will be targeting you out there. If you get hit and the bone is snapped clean through, your career will be over. You are not playing."

Dave stood on the sidelines watching as his Stampeders lost a heart breaker 24-21 to Ottawa.

The following year Dave started off fast only to suffer a collapsed lung after being kneed in the back. That injury cost him the last half of the 1969 season and the post season. There were rumblings around the league that he may be too brittle for pro football.

In 1970 Dave was healthy and had an outstanding year proving his critics wrong. He caught 32 passes for 6 touchdowns, rushed for 328 yards on 73 carries and helped Calgary back to the Grey Cup where they lost 23-10 to Montreal. Shortly after the season ended Dave was honored to find he had been named the outstanding Canadian on the 1970 Calgary Stampeders.

His former coach Jerry Williams who had left Calgary after the 1968 season to take over the reins of the NFL Philadelphia Eagles made Dave a lucrative offer to join him in the City of Brotherly love. Dave however decided to stay in the CFL.

In the off-season Dave stunned the Stampeders by requesting a trade to Toronto. He loved Calgary however his wife was from the Toronto area and wished to be closer to her family. Such a trade would also allow Dave to be much closer to his family in Sarnia. When Toronto Head Coach Leo Cahill heard Dave wanted to be an Argo he quickly swung a deal. The Argos were busy building a powerful team for 1971 and

Dave was seen as a key addition. Dave would be joining other high profile newcomers such as Jim Stillwagon, Joe Theismann, Leon McQuay, Tim Anderson, and Gene Mack. Toronto fans had high hopes they would see their first Grey Cup victory since 1952.

The 1971 Toronto Argonauts and Dave Cranmer came flying out of the gate. Early in the year he and Joe Theismann combined on a 94-yard pass and run for a touchdown to beat the Grey Cup champion Montreal Alouettes. The Argos won 8 of their first 10 games and appeared to be unstoppable. However as the year went on Dave was seeing the ball less and less. Coach Cahill had traditionally preferred to use the slot back as an extra blocker. Dave found this to be frustrating but being a good team player he never spoke out against the coach. Dave was also becoming very ill. He was suffering from Crohn's disease and this may have also had a bearing on his play. In one game his temperature went up to 105 degrees. The Argonaut trainer Mert Prophet wanted to pull Dave from the game, but the tough Canadian would not leave the line-up. By year-end Toronto had a record of 10-4 and Dave had finished with 27-pass reception for 2 touchdowns. He also rushed 12 times for 46 yards.

The Argos rolled into the Grey Cup against Dave's old team, the Calgary Stampeders. The 1971 Grey Cup was played in a heavy rain at Vancouver's Empire Stadium. Neither offense had any success moving the ball, as both defenses were utterly dominant. As the game went on Dave was getting more and more frustrated as he simply wasn't being used as a receiver or ball carrier. Late in the game with Toronto trailing 14-11 Argo defensive back Dick Thornton intercepted a Calgary pass returning it 54 yards to the Stampeders 11-yard line. On second down and 6 from the Calgary 7-yard line Toronto running back Leon McQuay slipped on the wet field and fumbled the ball costing Toronto the Grey Cup. Looking back on that play Dave told the author,

"I was only this far from the ball (pointing at a distance of about 5 yards) but I had no chance of recovering it. They should have given me the ball. There is no way my old team would have stopped me!"

1972 was a nightmare for both the Argos and David Cranmer. Dave had major abdominal surgery in the off-season as a result of Crohn's disease. The surgery cost him all of training camp and the first 6 games of the season. He used that time to good use however returning to Bowling Green to finish his Masters degree in Physical Education. By the time Dave returned to the Argo line-up the season appeared to be a write-off for the Boatmen. Devastated by injuries (David's among them) the Argos had collapsed to a record of 1-5. Dave tried to spur his teammates on but it was to no avail. The Argonauts missed the playoffs with a record of 3-11 and Dave was again

frustrated at his lack of use. In 8 games he caught 17 passes for one touchdown. He also carried the ball 10 times for 44 yards.

In the off-season Dave requested a trade hoping to join a team that would make better use of his abilities. His former Head Coach from Calgary Jerry Williams was now coaching in Hamilton and he eagerly traded for Dave. Dave figured his career was back on track playing for his former coach. The Ti-Cats shifted him to half-back and Dave started the year playing very well. Four games into the season he was stunned to find out the Ti-Cats had sent him to the BC Lions. Dave appeared in 3 games for the Lions before retiring. The Lions refused to pay his moving expenses to the West Coast and Dave figured with that, it was now time to start his post season career. Unlike many athletes Dave had taken advantage of the educational opportunities offered him through his athletic scholarship. He had worked tremendously hard to get his undergraduate degree while playing at Bowling Green, and later while still playing professional football, had earned his Masters degree. He was ready for the post football world.

Dave returned to Toronto and entered the brokerage business. Later on he moved back to Calgary where he worked in the brokerage area with former Calgary teammate Gerry Shaw. In 1986 Dave returned to Toronto and continued on in the financial world.