

# Preface

## A Slip in the Rain, The True Story of the 1967-1972

### Toronto Argonauts and The Fumble that Destroyed Canada's Team

The pounding rain continued to fall at Empire Stadium in Vancouver as Joe Theismann, rookie quarterback for the Toronto Argonauts, led his struggling offence on the field. The 1971 Grey Cup had so far been an exercise in futility for the usually high-powered Argo offence, and the team trailed the Calgary Stampeders 14-11 with less than three minutes to go in the game.

In the huddle, however, all the futility of the first 57 minutes was forgotten. The team had just got the big break it needed. Star defensive back Dick Thornton had intercepted an errant Jerry Keeling pass, returning it 54 yards to the Calgary 11-yard line in one of the most dramatic interception returns in the history of championship football games. The Argos were now poised on the verge of a Grey Cup title for the first time in 19 years. A touchdown would mean almost certain victory. At worst, they'd kick a field goal and send the game into overtime with plenty of Double Blue momentum. It was all there - ready for the taking.

The offence lined up as 40,000 stadium fans screamed while millions more sat glued to their TV sets. The Grey Cup - that vaunted, circular silver trophy the city of Toronto had been waiting 19 years for - was finally within their grasp.

The Stampeders had already begun to feel a sense of panic. They had lost the 1968 championship game in excruciatingly close fashion to Ottawa and been hammered in the 1970 final by Montreal. They were closely favoured to win this one, however, and it was now slipping away despite a superb performance by their defence.

Moisture clouds from the day-long, drizzling rain rose from the helmets of the huge lineman of both teams as they lined up prepared for the final drama - yet the ultimate decision lay in the mind of Toronto head coach Leo Cahill. Be conservative with the running game and play for the tie and a new chance in overtime, or gamble by throwing the football to the end zone in an attempt to win the game right now?

There was no hesitation in the mind of Calgary coach Jim Duncan. He ordered his Stampeders to stack the line of scrimmage with nine men ready to blitz. Leo called for a running play. Theismann quickly handed off to sensational rookie Leon McQuay, who crashed through the Calgary line, legs pumping and driving for four hard yards down to the seven-yard line. The crowd at Empire Stadium waited in tremendous

anticipation as the teams lined up once more on second down. Theismann barked the signals and again handed off to McQuay, who scampered to his left this time. The offensive linemen of the Argonauts exploded off the ball, trying to create a hole for their running back to bust through. Then, instantaneously, two things happened. One was the opening of a slight hole with almost a clear path to the end zone. The other was the arrival in that hole of Calgary middle linebacker Wayne Harris, perhaps the greatest to ever play that position in Canada. He was crashing in from the right on another blitz. McQuay cut back inside on the rain-drenched artificial turf . . .