

FOCUS ON: ALOUETTES He leads Montreal in receiving and has scored two touchdowns in three games

# Speedy Bratton making most of expanded role

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**T**hat Anthony Calvillo was the Canadian Football League's passing leader heading into the fourth week of the regular season comes as no great surprise.

But Brian Bratton as the Alouettes' leading receiver, sixth overall? That, quite frankly, might be more stunning than the fact Jamel Richardson is only third on Montreal, and 15th overall. It's early, but still ...

"That's the diversity we have right now with our offence. We have a lot of weapons," Calvillo said following Thursday's practice at Stade Hébert in St. Léonard. "Brian's done an amazing job of stepping in there and making some big plays – especially yards after the catch.

"But it's a long season and we're going to need everybody."

The 29-year-old Bratton has caught 12 passes for 226 yards while scoring two touchdowns. That includes a 69-yard pass-and-run score last week, against Calgary, when he ran from near midfield after Stampeder safety Eric Fraser jumped over him instead of making a tackle. Bratton, now in his sixth season with the Als, has career highs of 58 receptions, in 2009, and 675 yards, established last season.

The 5-foot-10, 185-pounder, one of the team's quickest receivers, has long flown under the radar, lined up primarily as the wide receiver on the strong side. But this season, following the retirement of Kerry Watkins, Bratton has moved into Watkins's spot on the weak side,

meaning he should get more action.

If nothing else, Bratton is making sure nobody is mentioning Watkins's name anymore. No higher tribute can be paid the unassuming Bratton, who said he'll never replace Watkins, who had super route-running ability.

"From a psychological and mental capacity, it meant they all have confidence in me to get the job done," said Bratton, who left practice early with cramping in his left leg, but is expected to play Saturday night, at Hamilton. "That position, historically in the league, has been a go-to position.

"It means I'm capable and they're confident. Put those two together, and you get some production."

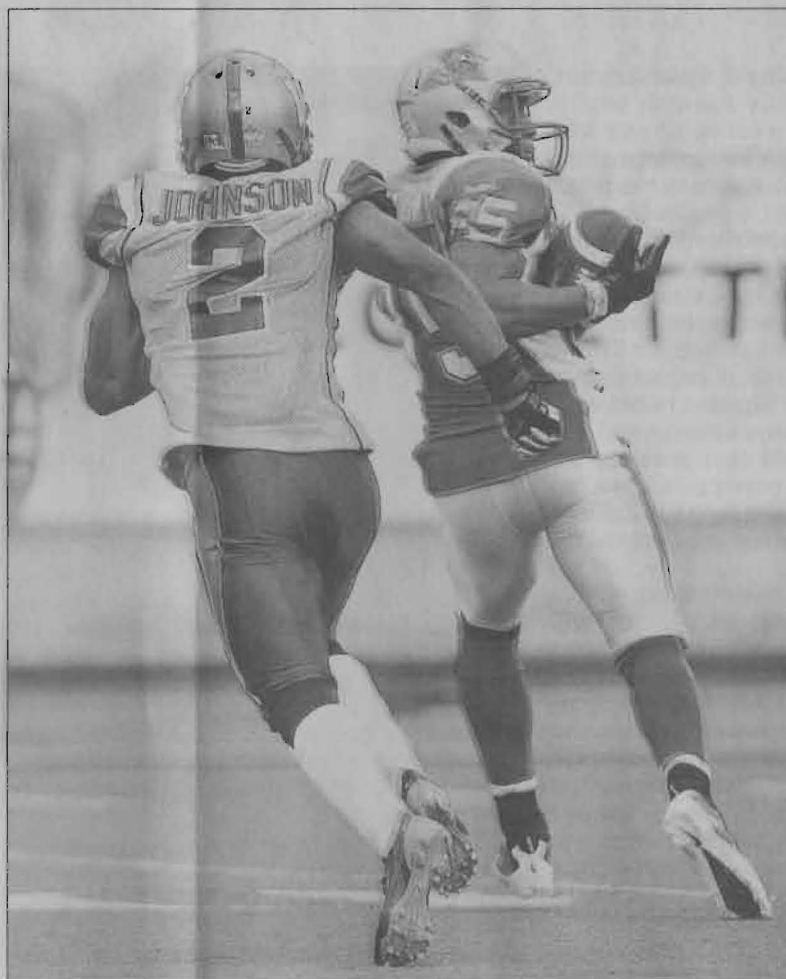
Bratton, who spent time in the NFL with Atlanta and Baltimore before venturing north, has never doubted his ability. But, playing on a team that always has been stacked with talented receivers, he long has been overshadowed. That's what makes his early-season production a revelation.

"If you asked me before the season, I would have said this was doubtful," Bratton said. "We've got a lot of guys here, (Richardson) being the obvious one, based on what he has done. But if you talk about my ability, I'd say no. I'm confident. The coaches and my teammates are.

"This is how it is now. Three weeks aren't a lot. I just hope I continue."

No player is preaching that mantra more than Richardson, undoubtedly well aware 15 games remain.

Richardson led the CFL in receiving last season, despite missing one



JOHN KENNEY THE GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Alouettes' Brian Bratton has caught 12 passes for 226 yards this season.

game with an injury. He caught 112 passes for 1,777 yards, while scoring 11 touchdowns. Only recently, he spoke, confidently, about the potential of a 2,000-yard season, but that

goal now is becoming less realistic.

Richardson has caught 12 passes for 166 yards and is still seeking his first touchdown. At his current pace, Richardson will make 72 re-

ceptions for 990 yards should he remain healthy.

Richardson said he's not being double-teamed. Instead, he added, teams are taking away certain routes from him. In many ways, he has become a victim of his success. But Richardson has surpassed 1,000 yards the last four seasons. It behooves him to find ways to get open and overcome any obstacles he's facing.

"I'll overcome it by being patient," he said. "It's going to open up. Teams can't keep doing the same thing. I was getting frustrated, but have learned to live with it. My chance will come.

"I have to find different ways to get in the game."

With the Als surrendering an average of 33.3 points per game – actually less than the Tiger-Cats' average of 36.3 – the emphasis will remain on the offence to carry the team, knowing they might have to score 35 to win. That remains a tall order.

"We feel like we have to score every time. That's our standard," Bratton said. "The offence is supposed to put points on the board and keep the defence off the field. Our job is to score."

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## POPP IN MOURNING

Als GM Jim Popp is in mourning following the death of his father.

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