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"He was very generous, always giving his time and effort to minor football," Marc-Olivier Brouillette says of his late father.

SPOTLIGHT Alouette delivers touching tribute to father as part of CFL's cancer battle

Brouillette wears pink with pride

WINNIPEG - He smiles often, it seems. And why not? As a second-year pro football player, newly married and about to embark on a burgeoning career as a lawyer, Marc-Olivier Brouillette has lots of positives in his life.

Of course, his father frequently smiled, too. Jean-Pierre Brouillette was a strapping man - 6-foot-4 and perhaps 250 pounds with a thick, grey beard. An Air Canada employee who later opened a downtown travel agency, Brouillette anxiously awaited his father's daily arrival home from work. Once, so excited was he at age 4, Brouillette raced to the door, attempting to jump on and leap over a couch. His head struck a wall, the scar a constant reminder of his youth and exuberance.

"I always remember him



HERB ZURKOWSKY
INSIDE THE CFL

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smiling. I don't remember him being upset," Brouillette, an Alouettes safety, linebacker and special-teams member, said during an interview Friday at the team's hotel.

"There were rules and boundaries at home, but there was never physical discipline or fear of getting spanked. It was a positive and happy environment."

October is breast cancer awareness month and, for two days, the Canadian

Football League is holding its Pink weekend. The Pink games - including Saturday's between the Alouettes and Winnipeg Blue Bombers (3 p.m., TSN, RDS) - are aimed to help women's cancer agencies, raise awareness and reduce the risks to women's health, according to commissioner Mark Cohon.

Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed form of cancer in women. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, 23,000 Canadian women will be diagnosed with it before the end of 2011, and 5,300 will die.

Reebok is providing CFL players with pink gloves, wrist bands and other items. Players will have a pink decal on their helmets, referees will use pink whistles, and coaches and other team personnel will wear pink on the sidelines.

But breast cancer isn't the only form of the dreaded disease. Brouillette will wear pink shoes, socks, gloves, tape, have a pink towel and has even found pink eye-black to apply, hoping to block out the stadium's lights and potential sun. It will be a touching tribute to his father.

Jean-Pierre Brouillette died of kidney cancer on Nov. 4, 1996. He was only 51. His son was only 10 at the time, unable to grasp the concept of cancer and death.

"He was very generous, always giving his time and effort to minor football," said Brouillette, who was raised and still resides in Dollard des Ormeaux.

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Als' path to Grey Cup, Page E4

BROUILLETTE Cancer-afflicted father 'was everything to me, a superhero'

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"He worked hard, 60 hours a week, but you'd always see him on the weekend. You might play at 8 a.m., and they were looking for parents to work, sometimes in the canteen. There wasn't one game he wasn't there.

"Even near the end, in a wheelchair with metal rods inserted into his legs to support his weight, strapped to an oxygen tank ... it was late October and getting cold, my mom would drive him to the end zone."

His father valiantly battled the disease for about 18 months, going for tests after noticing blood in his urine. Brouillette remembers being in the family home when his parents delivered the diagnosis to him and his brother, older by three years.

"We weren't familiar with cancer. The word didn't have much meaning to an 8- or 9-year-old," Brouillette said. "Parents, when dealing

with kids, they don't give it to you straight. They said everything would be fine and, for a long time, we did think that. Then he started chemo and lost his hair. Even at that age I could tell, maybe things weren't going to be fine."

Brouillette's parent went to a clinic in Houston. They had heard of a doctor and a procedure. Perhaps there would be a miracle cure. But when they returned, the news wasn't good, said Brouillette, breaking down.

"Towards the end, he was hospitalized and lost so much weight. He was skinny, a shadow of himself. I knew he was close to the end."

The call came to the family home at 4 a.m., his father having passed away in his sleep. They had visited the night before, his father weak, his tongue rolled up in his mouth, unable to speak. The one resounding message the father had for his sons always was to take care of their mother.

"The last night he was in such bad shape," Brouillette said. "He was everything to me, a superhero. There was nothing your father couldn't do. To see him like that, maybe at 150 pounds, was hard.

"That was the first time I've lost someone close. You kind of realize what's going on. You see the (regression) from the first day he was diagnosed. You finally realize what it is. You hear of it, but never see someone die in front of you. And you can't prepare. The process of death is difficult to describe."

There probably isn't an Al's player who won't wear something pink on Saturday - so many of them having been touched in some way by cancer.

From tailback Brandon Whitaker, whose aunt, Lashelle Bradley, survived breast cancer at age 48, but whose great grandmother, Dorothy Summers, died from it a decade ago.

"I'll have pink," Whitaker said. "A towel, wrist band, tape. My aunt was diagnosed two or three years

ago. She had surgery, she had a breast removed, but has been good since then. They caught it early.

"It's a big deal for me and it hits back home," said the native of Oklahoma City. "To go out and show and represent that is a big deal."

And, of course, quarterback Anthony Calvillo, arguably the Al's poster-child. His wife, Alexia, marks the four-year anniversary on Saturday of being diagnosed with B-cell lymphoma, making it just another year before she can be considered cancer-free. And Calvillo, himself, recovering nicely from thyroid cancer while leading the league, as usual, in passing.

Brouillette, meanwhile, prospered and turned out fine, despite his trauma, minor football coaches and fathers of friends providing the all-important male influences in his life and formative teenage years.

"My father was never too tired or didn't have time," he said. "I hope I'm half the father to my kids he

was to me."

Time does heal the wound, Brouillette admitted. But, for the longest time, the mention of his father's name or the disease would cause the emotions to flow again. Friday's interview was therapeutic, he said. But Brouillette knows Saturday's game will be emotional, as it will in two weeks, with another anniversary of his father's death.

"It brings back memories and a whirlwind of emotions," he said. "I don't remember the last time I cried, talking about him. I always believe he's still watching out over me."

And, as he leaves the dressing room at Canad Inns Stadium on Saturday for the opening kickoff, a son will think forlornly, once again, about a father, about the precious years they were denied, and will have a simple message for him.

"I'll tell him that I love him."

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