

# Als' depth tested by Estelle's injury

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## Newly acquired Rhinehart might start

Last weekend's acquisition of Coby Rhinehart from Calgary might prove to be one of the timeliest moves of Jim Popp's career:

Cornerback Mark Estelle suffered an injury yesterday during the Alouettes' final full workout before tomorrow's game against Saskatchewan. Estelle went high to break up a pass, but fell heavily to the grass, landing on his right shoulder and elbow as his helmet was knocked off.

His shoulder was wrapped and secured by an athletic therapist before Estelle left the field. He was taken to a hospital for examination. His condition wasn't updated by a team official.

Popp, the Als' general manager and head coach, was cautiously optimistic after practice.

"It's not his elbow. It could be a muscle spasm," he said. "The strength's there, which is a good sign. It means there's no structural damage. He might be fine to play."

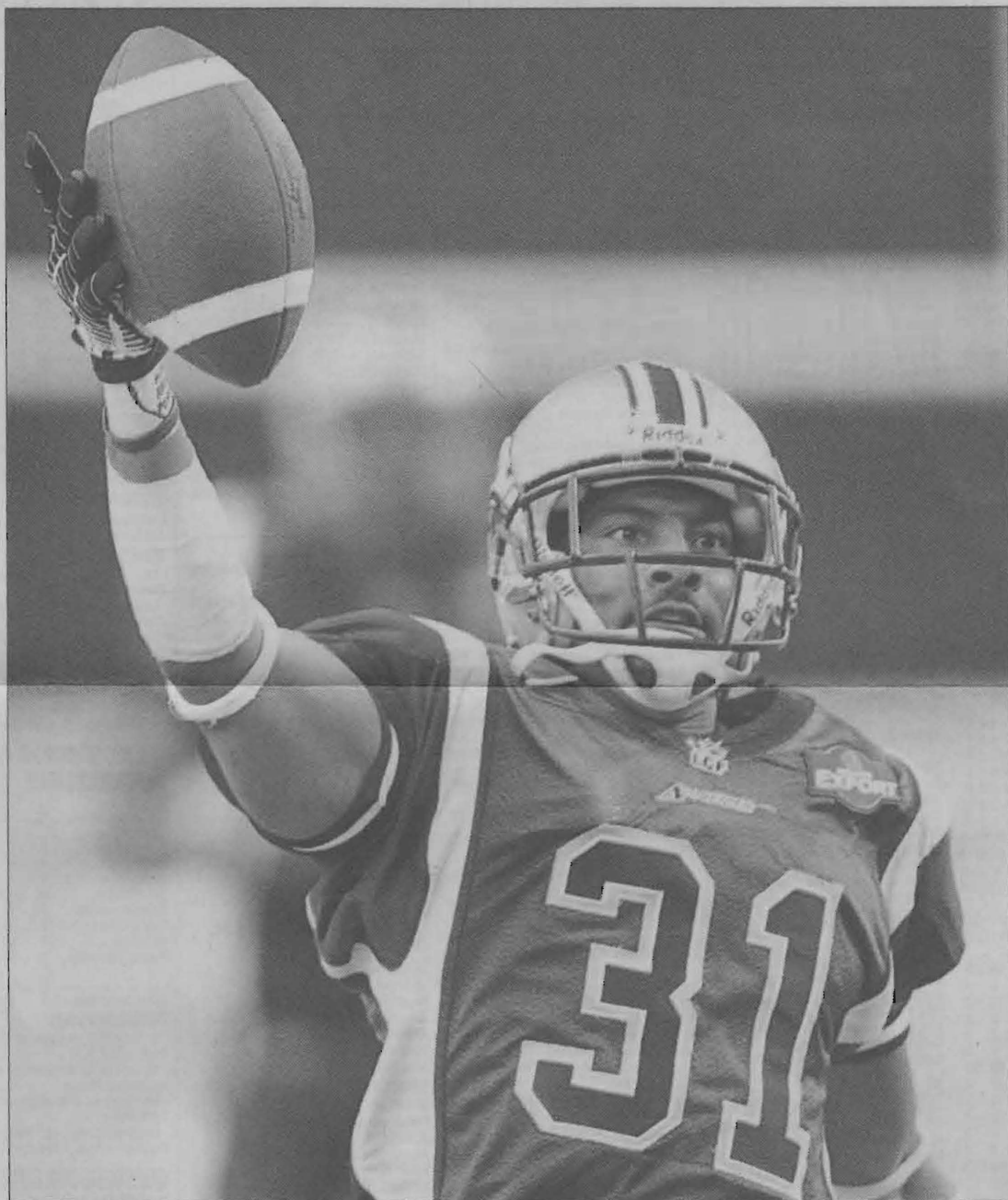
If not, the Als' options are limited. Rhinehart is the obvious candidate to replace Estelle.

Rhinehart, like Estelle, plays on the weak side. With the Stampede last season, Rhinehart intercepted a team-leading seven passes and was named a Canadian Football League all-star. The question remains: Has he learned enough of Montreal's defence to be comfortable?

"At corner, it's a lot easier. There's not as much to learn," he explained. "I think I'll be ready to play, if needed. This is a crazy game. Things happen like that. I hope (Estelle's) okay."

Linebacker John Grace, Rhinehart's former Calgary teammate, is high on the newly acquired defensive back.

"He plays the ball well in the air and he plays smart," Grace



JOHN MAHONEY GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Mark Estelle landed heavily on his right shoulder trying to break up a pass yesterday during practice.

said.

Grace, who started his career with Montreal in 2000, appears to have sufficiently recovered from his hamstring injury and is expected to start on the weak side against the Roughriders. Grace dressed for five games

over two seasons with the Als before going to Ottawa in the expansion draft.

"It'll be great to get back out on the field," Grace said. "I don't think I had the opportunity to play at Molson Stadium when I was here."

Meanwhile, for the third consecutive day, slotback Elijah Thurmon didn't practise, making it unlikely he'll play against Saskatchewan. Popp conceded Thurmon might be placed on the one-game injured list.

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