

# Payton set for debut with Als

## Edwards left home for Argos' game

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TORONTO - It has been an incredible week. First came the release of the latest Harry Potter book, and now this - the Canadian Football League debut of Alouettes running-back Jarrett Payton.

We know the former had more world-wide exposure, but given the Als' plight this season, Payton's debut is almost equally as riveting - at least in this small portion of the country.

After weeks of waiting - a process delayed when Payton turned his ankle during the team's opening training-camp scrimmage - fans finally will get a glimpse of Walter Payton's son tonight, when the Toronto Argos host the Als at Rogers Centre (7 p.m., TSN, RDS, CJAD Radio-800, CHOM-FM).

Despite proclamations by general manager/head coach Jim Popp that Payton will share the load, he should get the brunt of the work, after Robert Edwards, the Als' primary tailback this season, didn't accompany the team here.

That storyline is almost as big as the opening of Payton's place.

"I don't know exactly how to feel," Edwards told The Gazette from Montreal. "It was a shock this early not to even make the travelling squad. It's more insight into what might happen."

Edwards has had his troubles this season. A two-time 1,000-yard rusher with the Als, the former National Football League first-round draft choice has gained only 72 yards on 27 carries. That works out to a 2.7-yard average. He has scored one touchdown, but was stopped on a third-down gamble from the Winnipeg one-yard line in the fourth quarter of last week's loss. He has fumbled twice, losing possession once. Popp has accentuated the need to get more production from the position.

"It seems like this will lead down one path," Edwards said.

Asked if this could be the be-

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It's no secret Payton, the former Tennessee Titan, was Popp's marquee signing over the winter. He was flown to Montreal to meet the media and spent several days in the city, playing tourist at the Als' expense. That doesn't mean he or any other running back had a lock on the job.

Bruce Perry, a former Philadelphia Eagle, and Mike Imoh are highly thought of by the organization. But Perry was lost for the season before ever playing a regular-season game with a torn knee ligament. Imoh, who has displayed flashes, will miss the next nine games with a fractured collarbone.

And now it's Payton's turn. If you

don't count Montreal's exhibition opener against Toronto, when he was ineffective in a limited role, the 26-year-old hasn't played a game since 2006, when he scored in an NFL exhibition game against Green Bay. His mother, Connie, was expected to make the trip to southern Ontario from suburban Chicago.

"I've been waiting for this a long time ... just to have the opportunity," said the 6-foot-2, 217-pounder. "Now that it's here, it's like a dream. I want to be able to move the ball and be a factor. I want to put points on the board. I'm ready."

"You'll see passion, hard running and the real me. This is what I do. Football is what I know and love. You'll see everything."

The Argonauts historically have been

prone to large gains along the ground. But they've proven frugal in 2007, relinquishing an average of 33.8 yards a game. Only Saskatchewan and B.C. have been more difficult to run against.

"He has the whole package," Popp said. "He has speed for his size, is an excellent blocker and special-teams player. In this league, his size will be effective going against smaller linebackers. He's got the speed to go outside and he's got good hands."

"He showed us enough to want to keep him. We can't get too up or down. We'll have to remember this is his first game."

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