

Richardson's record feels hollow as Als miss chances



HERB ZIRKOWSKY

"It's going to be a long, cold winter ... unless they find a way to escape this abyss. In a hurry."

He has been one of the Canadian Football League's most dynamic players this season. But when the Alouettes required Jamel Richardson the most – when he was needed for one catch – he failed to deliver.

And because of it, never has a record tasted this shallow and empty.

"There's no excuse, I've got to catch it," Richardson said in the moments following the Als' 32-27 defeat against Calgary Sunday afternoon at Molson Stadium. "If I have the best hands in the game, I've got to catch it."

By now, you're probably aware the Als almost pulled one out they had no business winning, but four Stampeders turnovers kept the home team in the game.

And so, with 57.2 seconds

remaining, Anthony Calvillo tried valiantly to lead his team to a come-from-behind victory, marching his team from the Montreal 35. There was a 20-yard pass to Brian Bratton and a 37-yarder to Richardson – his fifth reception putting him over 100 yards for the 12th time this season, eclipsing a league record he shared with four others, including the legendary Hal Patterson.

That catch moved the ball to the Calgary 18. A pass to Brandon Whitaker gained seven more yards, and then the drive failed. As has been the case so often this season, when the Als required a touchdown, the two-time defending Grey Cup champions failed to deliver.

On second down, a pass to Richardson went through his arms. The ball had a lot of zip on it. "I had no choice," Calvillo explained. "I had to squeeze it between two line-backers."

It would have been a difficult catch, but one the CFL's leading receiver must make if Montreal has aspirations of defending its crown next month at Vancouver.

"To take us to the next level, we've got to finish tight games," Richardson said. "I've got to make that catch. We've got to find a way to make it work. If I make that catch, we win the game."

The Als still had one more



Alouettes' Jamel Richardson misses a catch as Stampeders' Brandon Smith covers him in the first half of yesterday's game. "I have a sour taste right now," Richardson said later.

PETER MCCABE THE GAZETTE

shot, but a pass to S.J. Green on third down was knocked down by cornerback Johnnie Dixon. It marked Montreal's fourth turnover, including three on downs.

Richardson has been brilliant this season, failing to reach 100 yards in only four games. He has surpassed 100 yards in six consecutive games, and 10 of the last 11. He has caught 110 passes this season – two short of tying the team record, held by Ben Cahoon – and has amassed 1,661 yards. But Richardson will take little solace from entering the record book, knowing the way the game ended.

"I have a sour taste right now," Richardson admitted. "I'd take a victory over the record. It feels like we lost the championship."

Several stalls to Richardson's right, Calvillo stood there, addressing the media while refusing to sit. He looked stunned and disappointed.

Calvillo passed for 380 yards, more than 200 of that total coming in the second half. In the process, he surpassed 5,000 yards this season for the sixth time in his career. Only twice this season has pro football's career passing leader thrown for more yards in a game, the Als winning both times.

And yet, the argument certainly can be made never has a 380-yard performance seemed so empty and unconvincing, Calvillo passing for one touchdown and leading the Als to two more offensive scores, yet completing only 24

of 43 attempts.

Instead, it was Calgary's relatively inexperienced Drew Tate, making his second consecutive start for the benched Henry Burris, who was the more impressive of the two pivots, passing for two touchdowns and 333 yards while completing 25 of 36 throws, taking advantage of the Als' inexperienced secondary, especially their two corners.

When the Als gambled from the Calgary 3 in the second quarter, Calvillo's pass was behind Brandon London. And Calvillo began the third quarter by being stripped of the ball by Charleston Hughes on the fourth play of the half, failing to sustain drives the rest of the period. And, even after a touchdown pass to

Eric Deslauriers pulled the Als to within a pair late in the game, the attempted two-point convert failed, Calvillo tripped up by Devone Claybrooks.

"We have to come up with plays. The coach has confidence in us and we've got to execute," Calvillo said. "It's up to us to make plays."

"We came out in the third quarter and shot ourselves in the foot ... two and outs, and then I fumbled on the first series," he added. "That can't happen."

"We knew the scenario. We had a great opportunity, and let it slip through our hands."

And isn't that the most damning aspect today? Yet again, for the second consecutive week, the Als failed to take control of the East Division. They blew a 15-point lead in the fourth quarter at Winnipeg, knowing a win would have clinched first place. On Sunday, a victory would have moved the Als two points ahead of the Blue Bombers with one game remaining.

"That's the way it has been all year," defensive-tackle Eric Wilson said. "It has been a roller-coaster for every team ... up, down and sideways."

They have nobody to blame but themselves, and it's going to be a long, cold winter for this organization unless they find a way to escape this abyss. In a hurry.