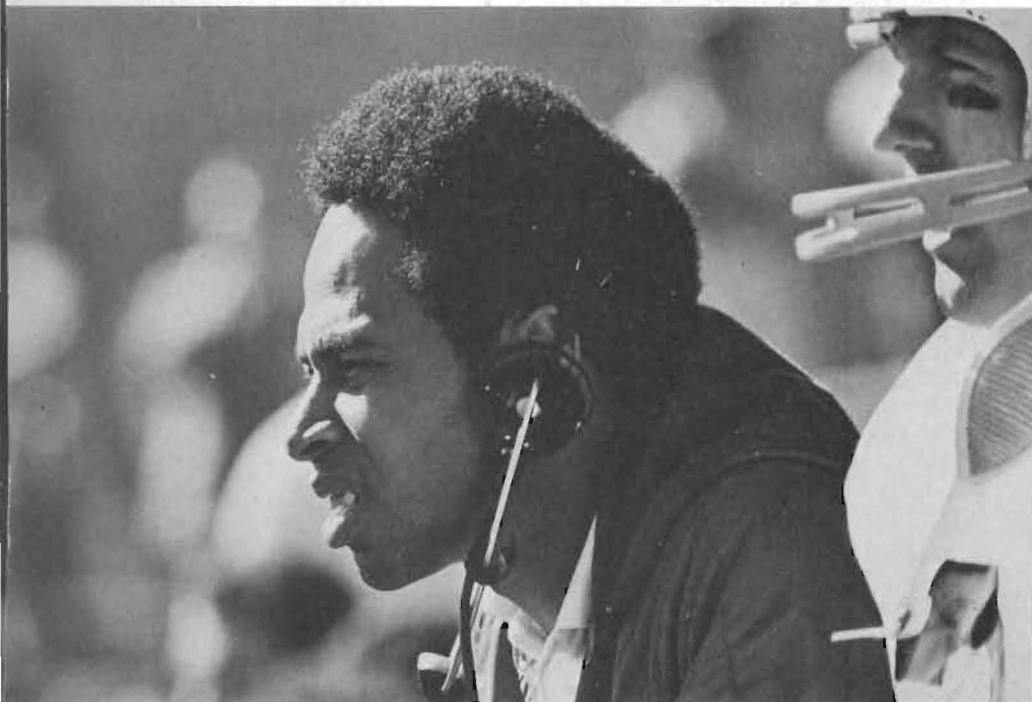




hey, Coach

Gene Gaines was willing to retire if it meant he could go into coaching. But the Alouettes got the best of both worlds, player and coach.



The longest one-man run in Canadian Football League history was made by Gene Gaines, and he'd like to see it some time—on film of course. Gene returned a kickoff 128 yards for a touchdown on behalf of Ottawa Rough Riders, against Hamilton Tiger-Cats.

The date was Nov. 14, 1964. The place was Lansdowne Park in Ottawa. The occasion was the first game of the Eastern Conference final series. Thanks to Gene's 128-yard kickoff return for a *touchdown*, Ottawa won the game 30 to 13. The Riders were to lose a week later in Hamilton 26-8, and thus lose the series by a heart-breaking single point—39 to 38.

There was one longer run in CFL history, but that was a two-man job, at Toronto's Varsity Stadium on August 22, 1958. Montreal Alouettes were leading Argonauts 14-1 early in the final quarter and Bill Bewley stepped up for a field goal try, from just outside the 20-yard line. The effort was wide, but fairly long.

Boyd Carter grabbed the ball four yards short of the dead ball line. This was determined by scanning the game film later, which is a requisite for purposes of determining records. Carter started

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Head set ignored, sidelined Gaines suffers the agony of one who would rather be on the field.

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to go one way, reversed his field and had advanced 15 yards when he lateralled to Dave Mann, still in the end zone. Mann raced down the near sideline, veered sharply and crossed over to the other side for an unhindered finish to a 131-yard touchdown play, which sparked Argos to a 15-14 win.

"I remember Jim Conroy throwing the first block and I remember Jay Roberts throwing the last one. But there were a lot of others in between."

Gene's scoring run was his all the way, but there was a lot of team work involved. "I got a lot of good blocks thrown for me," he recalls. "I remember Jim Conroy throwing the first block and I remember Jay Roberts throwing the last one. But there were a lot of others in between."

What happened was that Bernie Faloney had scored a Hamilton touchdown from the one-yard line to reduce Ottawa's lead to 14-7. On the kickoff, Ottawa was offside, so Hamilton elected to kick off again, this time from the 55-yard line.

"That's why it went so deep into the end zone," recalled Gaines, who hauled in the ball 18 yards deep. "As I say, I remember Jim Conroy making that first block. I don't have a distinct memory of anything else until I saw Don Sutherin, who had kicked off, coming at me. He had the angle on me and I think he'd have stopped me, but Jay Roberts blocked him off. I knew Sutherin was their safety man, so when I got past him I knew there was a touchdown to be had."

Years later Gene thought he would like to get a filmed memento of his 128-yard trip, but the Ottawa club's game-film library didn't have it in stock. He means to ask Hamilton Tiger-Cats some time this season to look in their film bank for a copy.

Gene hasn't done much scoring in his 14 seasons of Canadian football, because he has been on

defensive duty almost all of that time. When he first came to Canada, in 1961, with Montreal, the Alouettes had Don Clark and George Dixon who were first and third in Eastern Conference rushing records that year. There was no way he could break that pairing. Any time Clark and Dixon needed a brief rest, Dick Cohee was on hand and he averaged 7 yards per carry in relief.

J.I. Albrecht had recruited Gene, together with Marv Luster. Both had been with UCLA in 1960. A third member of the Bruins who rejected J.I.'s offer was quarterback Billy Kilmer, who has done pretty well for himself in football.

"I think I still have a school (UCLA) record," Gaines said recently. "I scored the two longest pass-receiving touchdowns in one game. One was for 77 yards and the other was for 76 yards. Kilmer was the quarterback."

The Alouette player-coach said J.I. didn't try to con him into coming to Canada. "J.I. pointed out I was pretty light for the National Football League. I was only about 168 pounds then. He said he thought I could play in the NFL, but he thought it would be better for me in Canada. I agreed with him that I was pretty light."

Had he ever regretted the move?

"I guess like most kids down there I had the dream of playing in the NFL and at times I think I would like to have tried. But as I look back over the years I'm glad I came to Canada. Canadian football has been good to me and I've enjoyed my years in it."

He stayed in Montreal only one year, that first time around. Then coach Perry Moss traded him to Ottawa in exchange for Angelo Mosca in 1962. He was with the Riders for eight years, through an unhappy 1969 season when he played out his option. When Sam Berger and Red O'Quinn left Ottawa to take over the Alouettes, Gene applied for a coaching job.

"I was willing to retire as a player, if that's what it took to go into coaching," Gene maintains. He didn't have to retire. O'Quinn made a deal that was mutually beneficial. He dealt Rod Woodward and John Kruspe to Ottawa and got Gaines for double duty as a coach and player.

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Now the 35-year-old Gaines is in his 14th season of Canadian football, something he never dreamed about when he was at L.A. Jordan High School in Los Angeles.

Gaines has never been a prolific interceptor, although he has been on the interception list for all 13 of his previous seasons. He barely kept the string going with a single interception in 1967. His high mark was six, in 1966. Last year might have been his finest ever for interceptions. He had three of them when he broke his ankle in the fifth game of the season and was not able to play again. He is now 10th on the all-time interception list with a career total of 40, and 6th on the all-time list of yards made on interception returns. Garney Henley of Hamilton and Larry Robinson of Calgary are the only two active players ahead of him on either list.

He takes a lot of kidding about he and Marv Luster getting long in the tooth as defensive backfield partners. "When guys have played the game as long as Marv and I, experience makes up for a lot of footsteps."

As a "designated" Canadian, he doesn't count against Montreal's import quota. In 1965 when the CFL constitution was changed so that each club could use only three players who had been converted to non-import status, any club that had fewer than three was entitled to "designate" another import to play as a non-import. Only two of the "designated" imports are still playing — Gaines and Saskatchewan quarterback Ron Lancaster.

It was Gene's own decision to play this year. General manager-head coach Marv Levy gave him an option.

"Marv Levy asked me if I wanted to play again and I said I did. I told him I wanted to play until I became a burden. I love to play football. When I'm no longer excited about playing—when my body fails to respond from the punishment—I'll know it's time to pack it in.

CFL experience over 14 seasons, starting in Montreal, then 8 years in Ottawa, (below) and back to Montreal gives Gaines credentials for coaching. ●