

Popp says he's sticking with Alouettes

WON'T BOLT FOR NFL
GM to honour final
year of contract

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THE GAZETTE

THURS. 20 MAY 2010

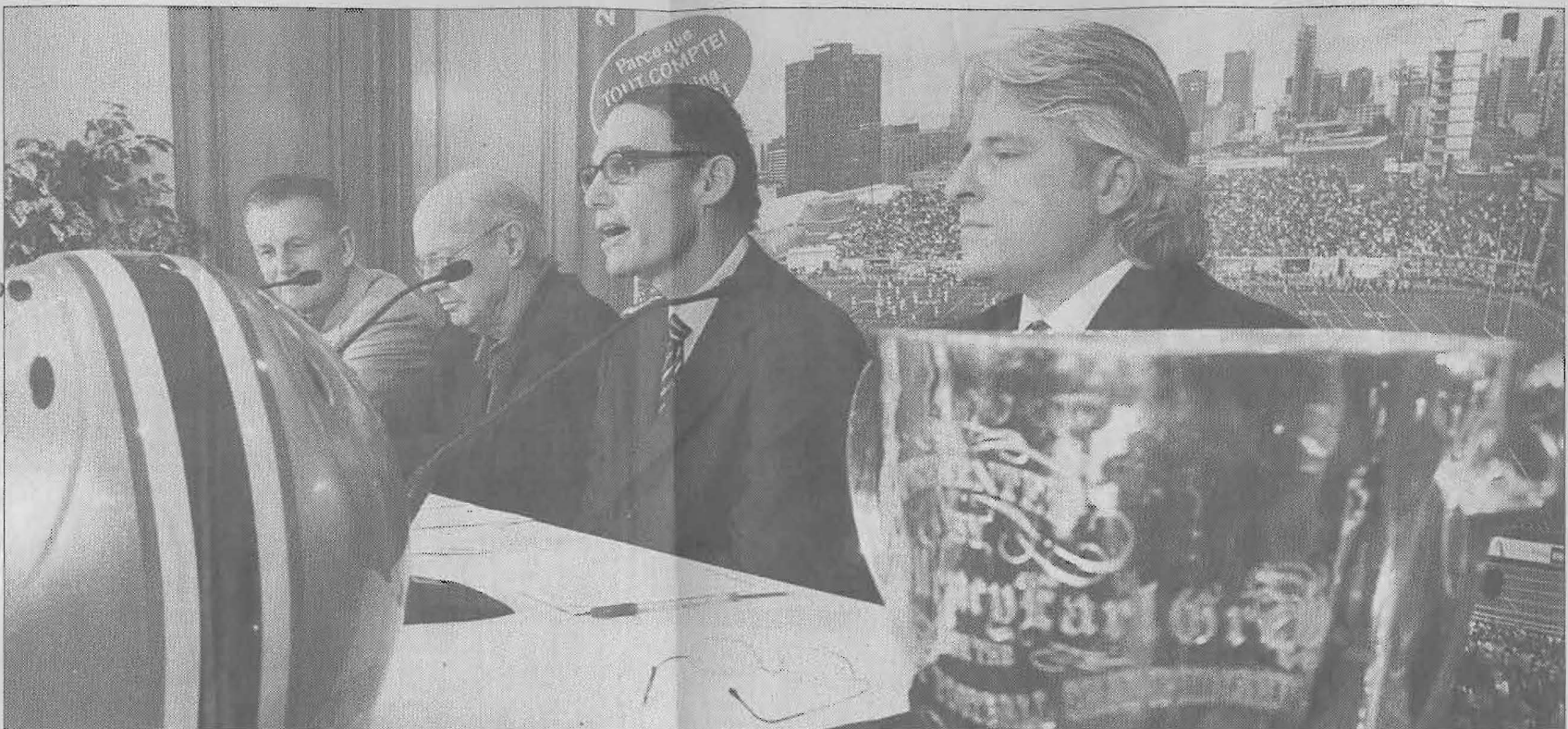
Alouettes general manager Jim Popp said he plans to honour the final year of his contract, and isn't anticipating leaving an organization he has helped build into a perennial Canadian Football League contender.

However, Popp refused to guarantee he'll complete the 2010 season with the defending Grey Cup champions.

"My plan is to be with the team, but I won't guarantee that 100 per cent, because there's never a 100-per-cent guarantee to anything," he said during a league-initiated conference call to discuss the state of the franchise — a call that frequently deviated into discussions regarding Popp's future.

The Gazette was the first to report last week that Popp could be in line for a job in the personnel department with the National Football League's Washington Redskins. Since then, numerous media outlets have reported several NFL teams might have an interest in Popp, who's well-known and connected in the U.S., given his lengthy tenure with Montreal. And his father, Joe, was a long-time assistant coach with the Cleveland Browns.

Further fuelling the speculation is the fact Popp has yet to sign a contract extension with the Als, although the



JOHN MAHONEY GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

"I've had plenty of chances to leave. I haven't done so and that doesn't mean I'm leaving now," says Alouettes GM Jim Popp (far right) with team brass.

sides have been negotiating for some time. Coincidentally, the organization announced an extension, through the 2012 season, for head coach Marc Trestman last December.

Also, Popp's suburban Montreal home is for sale.

"That's the plan — to finish the deal," Popp, 45, said. "I do have a contract. I'm working and have stayed loyal (to the Als). I've had plenty of chances to leave. I haven't done so and that doesn't mean I'm leaving now. My plan's to work for the Als this season.

"What I will do, and I will make it very clear, is what's best for my family — as I do every year," added the father

of six children. "I plan on being at training camp and working with this team. That's the plan."

Veteran players report for physicals June 5 and are on the field for the first time the next day. The Als have shifted their training camp this season to Bishop's University in Lennoxville. They've been at the military base in St. Jean since 1997.

Als president Larry Smith said he's confident the organization can retain Popp, although it's believed the majority of negotiations are between Popp's sister, a Washington-based attorney, and Montreal lawyer Paul Har-

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ris, who represents owner Robert Wetenhall. Wetenhall has didn't return a message left this week by The Gazette.

"It (the negotiation) is a long process, one that's important for Jim, the team and his family," Smith said. "He needs to make a balanced decision. That takes time. I think we're making progress but, until it's done, it's not done."

Meanwhile, Smith said renovations at Molson Stadium — 5,000 seats are being added, increasing capacity to 25,000 —

is on time and on budget. Montreal's mild winter resulted in few glitches for the project. So much so, the Als will play a June 19th exhibition game against Toronto at the stadium. It was expected the game would be held at Olympic Stadium.

Of the 5,000 seats, Smith said almost 3,000 have been sold to season-ticket holders. "The demand for tickets remains strong," he said. "The stadium gives us a new look while maintaining the intimacy."

On the field, a team that went 15-3 and defeated Saskatchewan in the championship game, has few holes to

fill. Missing are defensive-tackle Keron Williams, cornerback Davis Sanchez and returner Larry Taylor, who remains with the New York Jets.

"We're not thinking about repeating (at this time). That's not in our minds," Trestman said. "We've talked about how difficult it is coming back from a championship, but we're not going to change what we do.

"There will be challenges. Certainly there will be bumps in the road as we develop our team."

Note — The Als signed former NFL tight-end O.J. Santiago, 36. The non-import hasn't played since 2003.