

SOUND OFF

TRESTMAN HAS EYE ON THE BALL

"By focusing on even the smallest details, Als head coach makes strong impression"



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Alouettes head coach Marc Trestman is great when it comes to making first impressions.

When the Alouettes held a news conference to introduce their new coach in January 2008, Trestman's first words to the Montreal media were: "Je m'appelle Marc Trestman."

Smart move.

But the lasting first impression I have of Trestman came five months later, when the Alouettes opened training camp. One of the first things Trestman had his team practise was how to line up properly for the pregame national anthem: helmet off, standing on the sidelines at attention.

I wasn't the only one who took notice of what seems like a simple thing.

"For sure, I noticed that," former Alouette and CFL Hall of Famer Peter Dalla Riva, a proud Canadian, recalled when I spoke with him on Thursday. "I don't care where you are ... when you are in someone else's country, you have to have respect for the national anthem and the flag. It's a sign of respect, and you hope that they return their respect when they come to your country."

"Right from the start, when you watch how (Trestman) handles the team he's very professional. He reminds me of (former Alouettes coach Marv Levy) so much in his ways, all the fine details, all the little things that he takes care of."

Dalla Riva added that some of the Alouettes players were probably shaking their heads wondering why their new coach was

wasting valuable time at training camp teaching them how to line up for O Canada.

"The players maybe didn't understand it last year, but I think they now understand all the little things that at first might not have seemed important are important," Dalla Riva said. "They're small details, but that's what makes you a professional and that's what makes you win ball games. Marv was like that, too. He took care of all the little things."

Learning to line up for the national anthem also left a lasting impression on Alouettes quarterback Anthony Calvillo, who is an American.

"He's the first coach I've actually seen who has brought a personal side, which you don't often see," Calvillo told The Gazette's Herb Zurkowsky last year. "Even something like standing in line for the national anthem to show respect. To Americans, I took it for granted. But if not for the CFL, where would I be? Where would a lot of Americans be?"

Trestman also made a great first impression with Alouettes president Larry Smith when he interviewed for the job.

"We interviewed Marc with seven other candidates," Smith recalled of the interview process, which included team owner Robert Wetenhall and general manager Jim Popp. "We set up a grid that had 10 technical components and 10 management components, and Marc ended up scoring significantly higher than any of the other candidates. So that was our first signal that he had a lot of traits that we were looking for as a person and as a coach."

"From his first meeting, he impressed us in terms of how he conducted himself, how he asked questions, how he was humble. He wanted to learn about our game as opposed to tell us what he knew."

"We anticipated that he would add a certain degree of professionalism and discipline that some of our other coaches hadn't been able to do," Smith added. "He's been excellent at fulfilling our expectations, not only at doing that, but obviously



PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

One of the first things Als head coach Marc Trestman had his team practise last season was how to line up properly for the pregame national anthem.

running the team.

"We always had confidence in the coaching staffs that we've had, but Marc's just a little different than some of the other coaches we've had. It takes time to set up a track record, but from what he's shown us so far we're just thrilled to have him."

Now comes the hard part for Trestman. He led the Alouettes to a league-best 15-3 record this season, but it won't mean anything if they lose today's East Division final to the B.C. Lions, who finished the regular season 8-10.

Since their last championship in 2002, the Alouettes have an impressive regular-season record of 81-45 and have been to four Grey Cup games, losing them all,

including last year in Trestman's first season. The Lions (82-43-1) are the only team in the CFL with a better regular-season record since 2002. But the Alouettes are one of only three teams, including Hamilton and Winnipeg, who haven't won a Grey Cup in the last seven years.

The Alouettes won't earn any points for how they line up for the national anthem today at Olympic Stadium. But if you're at the game, watch them when they do.

It was one of the first steps in a two-year journey that has taken them to this point under Marc Trestman.

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