

Alouettes reward Trestman



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THE MONTREAL GAZETTE
TUES, 17 JULY 2012

Of course, in retrospect, someone should have figured the announcement would come on this day.

Marc Trestman, organized and meticulous, probably circled the calendar weeks ago, knowing it was a long week between games, knowing everybody from upper management would be in the city and available. That the Alouettes won their last game against Calgary in heart-stopping fashion was a bonus.

Trestman doesn't like the focus being on him. Never has, never will. Were the decision his, this four-year contract extension would have been announced after the season, but that would only have fuelled the speculation further regarding his status. Truth is, Trestman never was a lame-duck coach. His new deal – a personal-services contract with owner Robert Wetenhall begins next season – was agreed to before training camp started in June.

We knew little about Trestman before he arrived in Montreal in 2008, only that he



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"I'm really appreciative of what I have," Als head coach Marc Trestman says after signing four-year contract extension Monday.

had an impressive resumé in the National Football League as an offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. He had never been a head coach, nor was he familiar with the

intricacies of the wild and wacky Canadian game. And now, he's on the verge of becoming the winningest coach in franchise history – 10 regular-season victories from

surpassing Douglas Walker, who coached for eight seasons in the 1950s.

Nine seasons coaching the same team is virtually unheard of in professional

sports, let alone the Canadian Football League, where this season alone four of the eight teams have changed coaches.

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Trestman will be 60 at the time, should he fulfill the conditions of that extension. Regardless, he'll be remembered as a renaissance man, someone who put pride, honesty, character and integrity above winning. And someone who had incredible timing, joining an organization that has had the same general manager for 17 seasons, the same quarterback the last 15.

"A lot of what we say in interviews comes from him. We're an extension of the head coach," said QB Anthony Calvillo, one of a handful of players who dropped by Monday's mid-afternoon announcement at a downtown Montreal hotel. "He brainwashes us, to be honest, but a good coach gets his message across."

"I always tell him he'd be a good cult leader," Calvillo added. "He knows how to get people to follow. After a while, you start believing it."

It was Jim Popp, the Als' lone and only GM, who planted the seeds back in 2007, inviting Trestman to training camp as a guest coach. Although Trestman's visit was short, only several days, Popp, who also coached the team that season, asked Trestman to address the players, and asked him whether he would ever consider coaching in the CFL.

"I don't think he knew what I was talking about at that time," Popp said.

"When the coach changes, I've analyzed where our team has been, what it has been through, the guy we had before and what I felt the team needed next. If you're a good coach, you know your stuff. You'll learn the (Canadian) game."



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Alouettes owner Bob Wetenhall (right) hired head coach Marc Trestman in 2008 after interviewing 10 other candidates for the vacant job.

Yes, Trestman was a good communicator and speaker, Popp acknowledged. But he also wanted someone who had worked with quarterbacks and could take Calvillo to another level. Popp had hired Scott Milanovich, a former quarterback, the year before as offensive coordinator; Milanovich is now Toronto's head coach. And Trestman was the next piece to the puzzle.

"It's not because a guy's the best offensive or defensive coordinator that they're the next best head coach. That's what everybody sells," Popp said.

"I told him since Day 1 all

he had to worry about was coaching."

Trestman was the last of 11 candidates interviewed by Wetenhall. When asked which qualities he sought from players, Trestman listed integrity, teamwork and common decency, Wetenhall related.

"At the bottom was athletic ability. I'd not come across that before," the owner said.

Wetenhall spent 90 minutes asking Trestman the secret behind his success, good players being the only response. So Wetenhall spent three hours the following day, again trying unsuccessfully to decipher the code. And then he

offered Trestman the job.

More than four years later, Trestman remains a tough egg to crack, refusing to divulge whether the new contract contains an escape clause, or window of opportunity each winter, that would allow him to pursue a head coaching gig in the NFL or NCAA. Even Wetenhall suggested it would be a risk speculating.

We do know Trestman would dearly love to be an NFL head coach, that his name is linked to organizations each winter. We also know that omitting this clause would be an unprecedented oversight by someone

who leaves nothing to chance and covers all his bases. For now, all we can do is sit back and wait to see what transpires.

But something else came through on Monday as an emotional Trestman spoke, his voice cracking at times: How appreciative he is of this job. And of the chance Wetenhall and Popp took when others would not. Coaching the Als is a dream job for Trestman. It allows him six months at home, in Raleigh, N.C., being a father to his two girls, a husband to his wife. He can walk the dogs, go for groceries and anything else his heart desires, performing the tasks in near-anonymity. And maybe that far outweighs the fame and fortune — not to mention never-ending stress — associated with walking an NFL sideline.

"I leave at the end of May, clear-headed, without anxiety or regrets, focused and ready to do a job that I love," Trestman said. "Bob Wetenhall and Jim Popp have given me a quality of life I didn't think was possible. We've raised our girls. Our daughters are going to stay in Raleigh — and I want to be around. This gives me the chance. I'm really appreciative of what I have. That's the point of the day. A lot of people made this happen, or I'm miserable and we're not doing very well.

"The last four years have gone by in the blink of an eye," Trestman added. "I'm not concerned with what ifs ... how would you feel? ... what do you think? I just want to do a good job tomorrow at practice and get them ready to play."

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