

In Conversation With... Zeno Karcz

By Chris Durka



I recently had the pleasure of talking to Zeno Karcz, a Tiger Cat great that played his entire CFL football career in Hamilton from 1957 to 1966. He was part of 8 Grey Cup games, winning in 1957, 1963 and 1965.

Zeno grew up in Windsor and attended the same high school as CFL Legends, Joe Krol, Tony Golab and Tommy Grant. Karcz played junior football for the Windsor AKO Fratman and college football at Michigan before joining the Tiger Cats in 1957 and is still considered as one of the best linebackers in Tiger-Cat history. In 1956 Ralph Sazio recruited Zeno by placing him on the Hamilton Tiger Cat negotiation list. Sazio enticed Zeno with promises of a football future and other job opportunities that would be available to him in Hamilton so the rest is history.

I asked Zeno what were some of his most memorable highlights in his career as a Tiger-Cat and he said that there were so many but winning both the Grey Cup and the Schenley Award as the Outstanding Canadian in 1965 was one of most memorable. Another one that he mentioned was receiving a pass from Cam Fraser in a fake punt situation and scoring a 40 yard touchdown as a result of that reception. He also stated that the first game of the 1963 total point eastern semi-final game in Ottawa when the Ti-Cats resoundingly won 45-0 was another highlight that stands out.

I went on to asked him what were some of his more less memorable moments and he said losing the 1961 Grey Cup to Winnipeg especially when the Cats were up 14-0 in that game and eventually lost it in overtime 21-14. He also mentioned the 1958 Grey Cup when Ralph Goldston was ejected from that

game after Leo Lewis kicked Ralph when he was down. Although Goldstone retaliated Zeno felt that referee Dojack's decision was too severe.

I asked Zeno which coach did he like playing for the most, Jim Trimble or Ralph Sazio. He said that they were both good coaches and that he had no real preference. Sazio recruited him and Trimble gave young and new players the opportunity to play. Zeno was quick to add that although Ralph Goldstone was a defensive player only and not a coach, he was great in instructing and assisting him and other defensive players.

When I asked him who was the leader of the Tiger Cats during this time, without hesitation Zeno said Bernie Faloney. He said without a doubt that Faloney had great leadership skills, he was a great team mate and a real gentleman.

He said the toughest players that he ever played against were Herb Gray, the outstanding offensive and defensive player with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and Ron Stewart, the great running back with the Ottawa Rough Riders. Not only was Stewart hard to tackle but he was a punishing blocker also.

Zeno played with so many great legends but he singled out team mates such as Ralph Goldston, Gino DeNoble, Hal Patterson, Bernie Faloney and Tommy Grant as some of the players that he really enjoyed playing with. He especially mentioned Tommy Grant. He and Tommy Grant were very close. They grew up together, went through grade school and high school together and played Junior football and professional football together.

Zeno stated that the best team he was part of was the 1957 Tiger Cats, with the likes of Faloney at quarterback, McDougall and Gilchrist in the back field, Goldstone and Bawel on defence, Davis and DeNoble on the offensive line just to mention a few.

I asked Zeno about the 1965 Grey Cup that has been often referred to as the "Wind Bowl" due the very strong prevailing winds during that game. He said that Joe Zuger's driving punts were a strong reason for the Ti-Cats success in that game. The Blue Bomber kicker's punts went high and



then backward due to the extreme winds which ended up costing them three safety touches. Joe Zuger's low driving punts into the wind on the other hand gave the Ti-Cats good field position during that game. Zeno also took great personal pride in the 1965 Grey Cup game because Sazio gave him the special assignment to cover and blanket the Bomber's great running back Leo Lewis throughout the game. Wherever Lewis went it was his responsibility to go with him. Zeno was referred to as monster man in that assignment and successfully contained Lewis throughout the game.

Zeno Karcz came to Hamilton and settled here, retiring in 1966 as a Tiger Cat. His last comment was a tribute to the fans in Hamilton. He said that he loved the Ti-Cat fans when he played here, that they are the best fans in the CFL and nothing has changed, they are the same today as they were then.

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Chris is a long-time Tiger-Cat fan, season ticket holder, historian and collector of Tiger-Cat memorabilia and autographs. Over the years, Chris has had the honour to speak with many Tiger-Cat players whom he now recalls in conversation.

