

In Conversation With... Dave Fleming

By Chris Durka

My recent conversation was with former Ti-Cat legend Dave "The Fly" Fleming. Dave played his entire professional football career in Hamilton, from 1965 to 1974 and played on 3 Grey Cup Championship teams in 1965,'67 and '72. During his illustrious career Dave scored 50 touchdowns, both by running and receiving, the most by a Ti-Cat running back. He also holds the team record for the longest touchdown pass reception of 108 yards and accumulated over 3,300 yard rushing during his career. In 1970 Dave was selected as a CFL Eastern All Star.

Dave is originally from Pittsburgh where at tender age 18 he went directly from high school to play semi-pro football. This is where the football scouts of the NFL Pittsburgh Steelers spotted him and signed him to a contract. He spent a couple years with the Steelers and then was picked up by the AFC New York Jets where he roomed with Joe Namath during the pre-season, until Ti-Cat coach Ralph Sazio made the scene. Sazio was on a scouting trip and offered Dave a couple thousand dollars more than the Jets plus a starting position with the Cats so Dave jumped at the opportunity.

During his playing days in Hamilton, Dave was extremely versatile in that not only did he play offence but also defence and special teams. He said that he loved playing for coach Sazio because of his rough character and especially because he would constantly yell at



him. Dave said, "he was the craziest coach that he had ever played for".

Angelo Mosca was Dave's closest team-mate and for 10 years they were room-mates during the out of town football games. Dave mentioned one time when he came back to the room at curfew time and found big Ang under the sheets reading the bible. I wasn't sure if Dave was serious or not with this mainly due to his joking nature. He did say though that he and Mosca would love to go out and socialize together at some of Hamilton's finest establishments.

There were numerous great memories that Dave recalled starting with, as he put it, the great Hamilton football fans. He said that they were hard working, strong steel town people similar to the folks from his hometown area in Pennsylvania. The 3 Grey Cup victories stand out he said particularly the 1967 Grey Cup team that he said had to be the greatest team ever. Another highlight was his touchdown reception in the 1972 Grey Cup game. When I mentioned that many who remember that game still feel that his foot was out of bounds he just laughed and said that he was definitely inbounds. As mentioned previously, the 108 yard touchdown reception was another highlight in his career. It was on Labour Day, 1971 when he caught a swing pass from Joe Zuger and out manoeuvred and out ran 2 Argo defenders the length of the field.

During his time in Hamilton Dave said that enjoyed playing for 2 quarterbacks, Joe Zuger and Chuck Ealey, who he mentioned had their own distinct QB styles. Zuger he said was mainly a drop back pocket passer while Ealey more of a roll out pass or run QB. Dave said that he liked both styles but did mention that he really liked when Zuger would call the QB option where Joe would roll out to run wide and then flip the ball to him just before being tackled.

Dave said that he had the great pleasure of playing with a number of great players, giving special mention to Angelo Mosca, Bill Danychuk, Jon Hohman, Willie Bethea and Joe Zuger. It was his team mates that gave him the nick-name "The Fly" while at the same time nick-naming his running mate Ed Buchanan "The Flea". So the Ti-Cats had both the Fly and



the Flea in their backfield that year.

After his retirement Dave settled back to his Pittsburgh area roots where he got involved in weightlifting. He eventually set a number of U.S. bench pressing records in his age class. He also got into coaching and helped the local semi-pro football team; the Pittsburgh Colts win a couple national championships. Recognized for his football and sports achievements Dave was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame.

Dave stated that he had no regrets leaving the New York Jets to come and play in the CFL. He said that he loved it in Hamilton particularly playing for the dedicated football fans here. He recalled the great support from the fans at the football rallies that were held during the semi-final playoffs. He also mentioned numerous times during our conversation that he would really like to be inducted onto the Hamilton Tiger Cat Wall of Honour at Tim Horton's Field. Due to his numerous football accomplishments during his lengthy career in Hamilton there is definitely a strong argument for this.

This conversation with another Hamilton Tiger Cat great and legend was again enlightening and intriguing. His candid and fun loving nature made the whole conversation a lot of fun. Dave Fleming, the player was without a doubt a true grit Tiger-Cat.



CHRIS DURKA 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.