



Mudding Around With The Pigskin

Story and photos by Tom Hicken

It's a brisk November morning at W. A. Porter Collegiate, but the sun is out and shining down on the Scarborough high school's football field. Toronto firefighters stand in each corner where hoses snake up from their pumper parked below into their hands, spewing out hundreds of gallons of water in large arches onto the field. As violent streams of water peak in the air and sprinkle downward, offset dew is caught between the sun's rays and glossy rainbows can be seen hovering above the murky brown field below. It's going to be a dirty mess and that's exactly how they want it.

Slowly, students start to populate the track surrounding the field. Speckled across the gravel and joined by schoolteachers and eventually the media, all keep busy chatting to one another as they wait in anticipation for the big event of the day: Mud Bowl.

Originally played during the 38th Grey Cup in 1950, the historic Mud Bowl was a result of unfavourable weather conditions that lead to a field full of muck that players had to endure. Soon afterward the game became famous as a landmark in Grey Cup history. As part of the 100th Grey Cup festivities leading up to the actual game, the re-creation of the Mud Bowl is one of many other events springing up across the city of Toronto. To recreate the original game, local media personalities fill in for the two teams, the Toronto Argonauts and the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, and are decked out in retro CFL uniforms.

With the Argonotes marching band piping out songs, cheerleaders hiking up their skirts and the school mascot parading up and down the field, there's no doubt a pep rally is about to get underway. Soon enough a sea of blue uniforms burst onto the scene, rushing past the crowd who swell into a cheer for their very own varsity football team, the Porter Blue Eagles.

Two men make their way to a makeshift stage set up next to the now soaked field, lugging a hardcase with a big red 'fragile' sticker plastered to it. One of the men is Dennis Dowell, keeper of the Grey Cup, and after he unpacks the historic artifact, he steps aside for all to see it glisten in the sun. Another relic is on stage – 86 year-old Nick Volpe, who kicked two field goals during the original Mud Bowl. Sixty-two years later, the former Argo is able to recall the harsh conditions of the famous game and tells the crowd how the mud made it difficult to run and how

players could barely hang onto the slippery ball that day. Volpe reaches under his arm and shows off the original game ball encased and autographed by his teammates before the official Grey Cup coin is revealed. Officials are weary of soiling the coin on the mud-filled field and opt to toss the coin right there on stage; the Blue Bombers take possession.

The middle-aged media personalities turned football players run and slide on the field; some gaining more air than others, some belly flopping on to the mud, all staggering up and limping off. Just because there's mud on the surface doesn't make for a soft landing. Soon the game is underway, and it's a messy one. Players slip-slide, flail arms and likely pull muscles, but the amount of enthusiasm is an indication of how much fun everyone is having. Before long, the distinctive team uniforms are unrecognizable as players all sport their new brown colour. Some wear brown war paint as a result of a face plant. In the end the Argonauts shut out the Blue Bombers with an impressive 12-0 win, but there are smiles all around.

As things wind down, players step off the field to get hosed off. It may have been the cold weather, but by the end of the day everyone at Mud Bowl is caught up in Grey Cup fever.

Bottom left: Monika Platek, digital host from TSN, gets a taste of the Mud Bowl.

Bottom right: Toronto Star reporter Brendan Kennedy hoses himself off after Mud Bowl.



Clockwise from top left: SATEC's varsity football team, the Porter Blue Eagles, are cheered on by fellow students and teachers at W.A. Porter Collegiate.

Students and teachers get high-fives from Justin Vandenberg of The Score as he rushes onto the field.

David Menzies of Sun News Network sports mud on his face after a play at the Mud Bowl re-creation.

Dennis Dowell, keeper of the Grey Cup, prepares to unpack the historic Grey Cup.

Nick Volpe, 86, who kicked two field goals during the original Mud Bowl, recalls the conditions of the historic game during a ceremony before the re-created game.

A Toronto Firefighter releases gallons of water in order to flood the field at W.A. Porter Collegiate hours before the Mud Bowl re-creation begins.

Rudy Blair from 680 News gets a pat on the shoulder from Sportsnet 590's David Alter after both end up in the mud.

