

1965 Grey Cup a Windy Affair

By Brian Snelgrove

The hills were alive with The Sound of Music, The Rolling Stones couldn't Get No Satisfaction and Get Smart was one of the most popular shows on television.

Has it really been a half Century since the Hamilton Tiger-Cats won the famous Wind Bowl?

The year was 1965 and two familiar foes squared off for the 53rd Grey Cup before 32,655 fans at Exhibition Stadium in Toronto. The Hamilton Tiger-Cats and the Winnipeg Blue Bombers were meeting in the big game for the sixth time in nine years. Winnipeg had won four of the past five.

Hamilton had finished in first place in the East with a record of 10-4. After winning their last four regular season games, they knocked off the Ottawa Rough Riders by a combined 35-20 count in the two-game total point Eastern Final.

Like many Tiger-Cat squads of the 60's, the backbone of the 1965 Grey Cup team was the defense. Hamilton's defensive roster was led by CFL all-stars John Barrow, Garney Henley, Zeno Karcz, Billy Ray Locklin, Bronko Nagurski and Billy Wayte. Other key players included Don Sutherin, Angelo Mosca, Bob Krouse, Bobby Kuntz and Herb Pattera. On offense, Ti-Cat head coach Ralph Sazio also had an arsenal of talent at his disposal including Tommy Grant, Willie Bethea, Gerry McDougall, Hal Patterson and Joe Zuger.

The Blue Bombers had an impressive line-up as well, led by signal caller Ken Ploen and running back Leo Lewis.

Strong, gusty winds of 50-60 km per hour prevailed for most of the game. CFL officials and both teams agreed to change the rules so that punts into the wind would be ruled dead as soon as the receiver touched the ball.

"The wind was the biggest factor in the game," says Zuger, who served a dual role as both quarterback and punter. "I was always conscious of the wind both for kicking and passing. It was very strange my first few years up in Canada – the Fog Bowl in 1962, the Angelo Mosca, Willie Fleming incident (1963) and then the Wind Bowl."

"It was continuous pretty much the whole game," adds Krouse. "The ball would virtually

stop because of the wind. The kickers tried to kick it high but it would come back almost behind them. Being by the water in the Fall caused a lot of controversy in Toronto, first with the fog in '62 and then with the wind in '65."

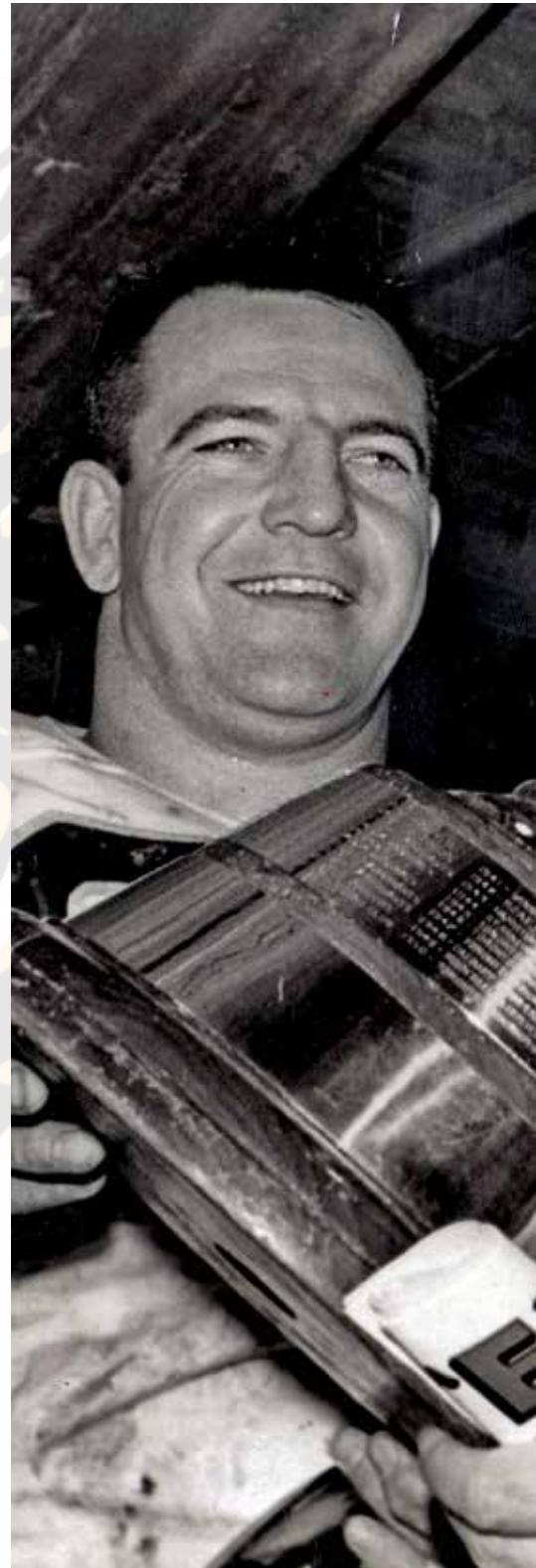
The weather would ultimately play a role in the outcome of the game. In those days a team giving up a safety touch retained possession of the ball. Going into the wind in the first and third quarters, Blue Bombers head coach Bud Grant opted to concede three safety touches with the ball deep in Winnipeg's territory. Although some have said the strategy backfired and cost the Bombers the game the reality is had Winnipeg punter Ed Ulmer kicked into the wind, the Ti-Cats undoubtedly would have received excellent field position. In all likelihood they would have scored some points off those punts. At any rate, the six conceded points became the margin of victory as the Tiger-Cats hung on for a 22-16 win.

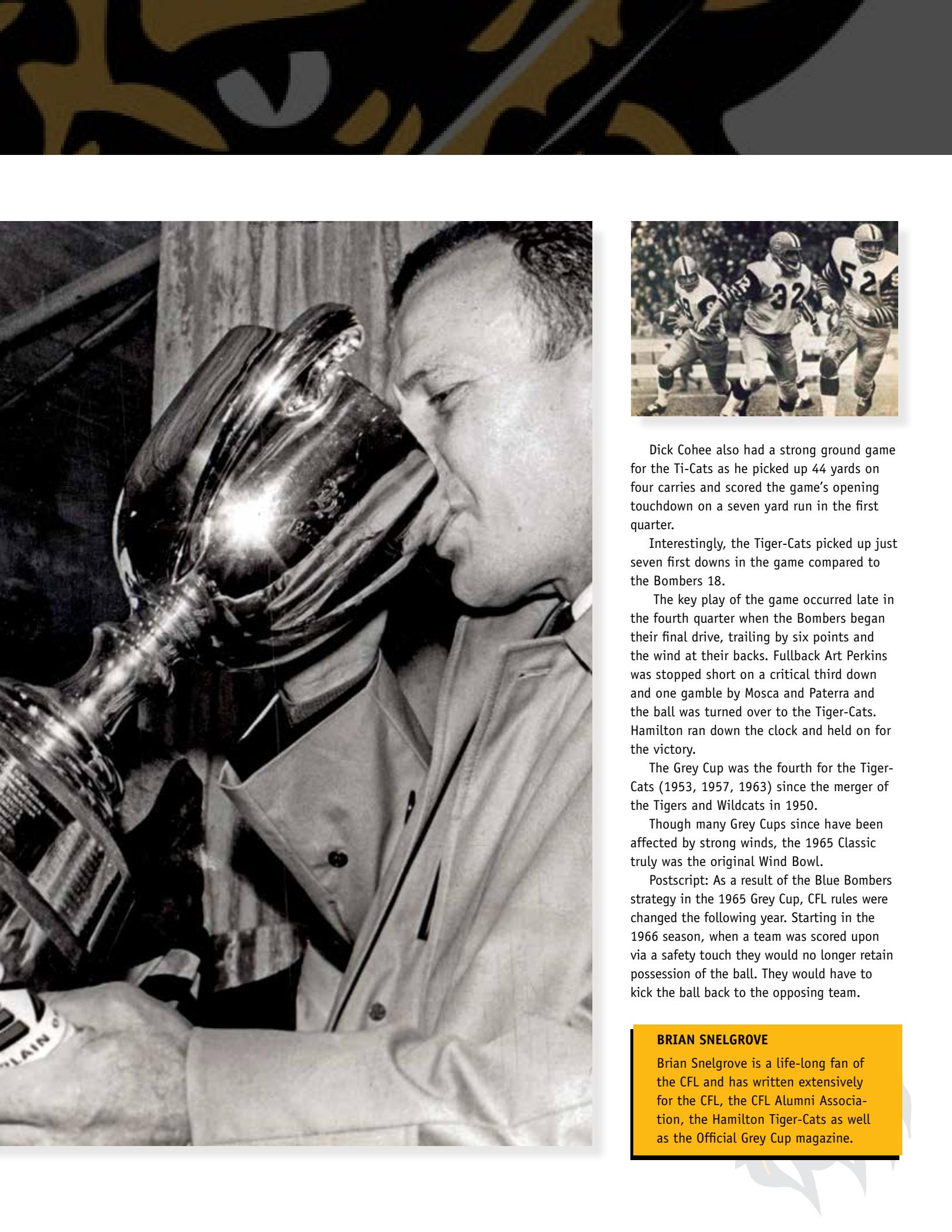
"Ralph (Sazio) never conceded points," says Zuger. "We're not giving anything away he would say. Make them earn it."

All the points were scored with the wind. The Tiger-Cats trailed 13-10 at half-time but scored 12 unanswered points in the third quarter. Heading into the final frame Hamilton clung to a precarious 22-13 lead. Fortunately for Ti-cat fans, the Bombers could muster just a field goal by Norm Winton with the wind in the final quarter.

The wind played havoc not only with the kicking game but also when it came to throwing the ball. The two teams combined for just 17 passing attempts but ran the ball a combined 80 times. The wind was so strong that Hamilton attempted just five passes.

In fact, Willie Bethea was the only Tiger-Cat to catch a pass – he pulled in both completions by Zuger for 71 yards. One of Bethea's receptions was good for a 69 yard major in the third quarter. "It was an unbelievable catch," says Zuger. "He got his hands right around the end of the football and caught it from behind. It was incredible." Bethea led the team in both receiving (two catches for 71 yards) and rushing (12 carries for 68 yards).





Dick Cohee also had a strong ground game for the Ti-Cats as he picked up 44 yards on four carries and scored the game's opening touchdown on a seven yard run in the first quarter.

Interestingly, the Tiger-Cats picked up just seven first downs in the game compared to the Bombers 18.

The key play of the game occurred late in the fourth quarter when the Bombers began their final drive, trailing by six points and the wind at their backs. Fullback Art Perkins was stopped short on a critical third down and one gamble by Mosca and Paterra and the ball was turned over to the Tiger-Cats. Hamilton ran down the clock and held on for the victory.

The Grey Cup was the fourth for the Tiger-Cats (1953, 1957, 1963) since the merger of the Tigers and Wildcats in 1950.

Though many Grey Cups since have been affected by strong winds, the 1965 Classic truly was the original Wind Bowl.

Postscript: As a result of the Blue Bombers strategy in the 1965 Grey Cup, CFL rules were changed the following year. Starting in the 1966 season, when a team was scored upon via a safety touch they would no longer retain possession of the ball. They would have to kick the ball back to the opposing team.

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Brian Snelgrove is a life-long fan of the CFL and has written extensively for the CFL, the CFL Alumni Association, the Hamilton Tiger-Cats as well as the Official Grey Cup magazine.