

# In Conversation With... "Rufus Crawford"

By Chris Durka



The Hamilton Tiger Cats have been fortunate over the years for having very talented special teams / all- purpose yardage players. One of these great players

was No. 21 Rufus Crawford. Rufus played running back, slot back, punt returner and kick returner. He demonstrated his football talents at Virginia State University and began his professional football career with the NFL Seattle Seahawks.

Rufus ended up in Hamilton after a stint with Seattle. His rights were picked up by the Winnipeg Blue Bombers who in turn, after a short period of time, sent him to Hamilton on an apparent loan basis. Whoever heard of such a thing, was he traded or not? Ray Jauch the Winnipeg coach called him in and informed him that's exactly what it was. The rest is history, Rufus arrived in Hamilton and showed off his football skills from 1979 to 1985.

Rufus said that he was happy to leave Winnipeg because he had never been so cold before in his entire life. He was raised in North Carolina and the weather in Winnipeg was nothing like he had ever experienced before.

Rufus was met at the airport in Toronto by Joe Zuger who at the time was the running back coach with the Ti-Cats. Rufus said he quickly found out that Coach Zuger was a man of few words because on the drive from Toronto to Hamilton Coach Zuger might have said five words to him at the most. However, when they approached downtown Hamilton Coach Zuger asked him what he thought about the downtown area. All Rufus could remember was that they drove through it before he could articulate his thoughts. He couldn't get over how small it was in comparison to the American cities that he was used to. Once in Hamilton Rufus said with much sarcasm that he had the distinct pleasure of staying at the luxurious City Motor Hotel which was located in the east end of the City.

I asked Rufus what he remembered about the coaches that he played for here in Hamilton. Frank Kush immediately came to his mind. He said that Coach Kush would constantly make the team run and run and run, not only laps, but up and down the stadium steps. Rufus said Coach Kush would also join in and run too because he would not make the players do something he would not do.

Rufus went onto say that his team-mates such as Ben Zambiasi, David Shaw and Howard Fields were the locker room team leaders which contributed to the stability of the team. Howard Fields was also known as H-Bomb because you just never knew when he would explode. Rufus mentioned that during his career in Hamilton he developed strong friendships with a number of players such as Obie Graves, Johnny Sheppard, David Shaw, Less Browne, Grover Covington, but Felix Wright, who played defensive back for the team, became his closest friend with the Ti-Cats.

When I asked him who was his favourite quarterback in Hamilton Rufus adamantly answered Tom Clements. He said that Tom was a very talented and intelligent quarterback that he really enjoyed playing with. He said when Clements wore his glasses he reminded him of Clark Kent, the original superman.

Rufus's most memorable experiences were numerous, he said that the Labour Day games against the Toronto Argos was definitely the most important league game of the year. He said that it seemed everything else came to a standstill.

Other great memories were his relationship with Ti-Cat fans, the Grey Cups that he participated in and obviously the 1984 football season when he broke the CFL all-purpose yardage record that had been held by Hal Patterson for 28 years. Due to this outstanding achievement he won the Eastern Outstanding Player Award and represented the Eastern Conference for the prestigious Schenley Award.

I asked Rufus who he felt was the toughest player he had ever played against in the CFL and he stated that Eskimo's all-star linebacker Dan Kepley was the toughest by



far. Rufus recalled a funny situation during a game against the Eskimos. He received a pass from Clements beating Kepley's coverage and turned up down field for a 50 plus yard touchdown when everything suddenly went dark. The lights at Commonwealth Stadium went completely out and stayed out for about 45 minutes.

Rufus's playing days ended in 1986 and although he was not physically part of the Tiger Cat team that won the Grey Cup that year his heart and support was with his team mates and therefore felt very much part of that Grey Cup team.

Rufus Crawford was successful as a professional football player and is also a successful in life after football. He currently lives in Newmarket and has become an accomplished actor with numerous impressive credits to his name. When he is not acting he keeps busy working at a Fitness Club in Markham.

Rufus was exciting to watch with his elusive moves and his dashing speed. His versatility made him a multiple offensive threat from anywhere on the field. He was an exceptional player and a true example of Hamilton Tiger Cat football.

## CHRIS DURKA

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.