

In Conversation With... Dave Viti

By Chris Durka

Last week I had the pleasure of talking to former Tiger Cat #70 Dave Viti who played his entire professional football career in Hamilton from 1962 to 1969.

Dave was originally from Rhode Island and played collegiate football at Boston University. This is where he caught the attention of Ralph Sazio who was an assistant coach for the Ti-Cats at the time. Ironically Sazio was at the Boston University scouting another player but was so impressed with Dave that he convinced Dave to sign what was supposed to have been a non-binding contract.

This was the understanding because the American football draft had not taken place yet and if Dave was selected in that draft and offered more money by the team that selected him he could then officially sign with them. It turned out that Dave was selected in the 6th round of the American Football League draft by Buffalo Bills and in round 9 by the Washington Redskins during the National Football League draft. When Dave was offered more money to play with Buffalo, Sazio, let's just say persuaded him to demonstrate his football talents north of the border and this is how he ended up in Hamilton.

In his rookie year in the Canadian Football League in 1962 Dave mentioned how impressed he was with the passion and support of the Canadian football fans and how this was particularly shown during the Grey Cup Classic. He said the national interest that was demonstrated was second to none, surpassing even the US championship games in the 1960s.

One of Dave's most memorable moments



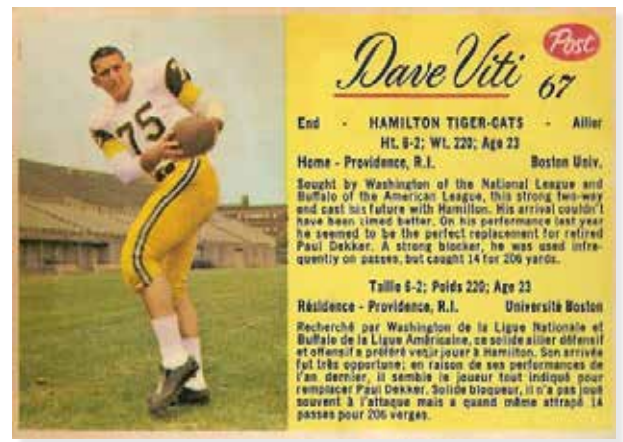
was in fact that 1962 grey Cup game when he caught a touchdown pass. Other great memories were the 5 Grey Cup games in which he participated in, winning 3 of them in 1963, 1965 and especially 1967. The 1967 team was special because he was part of a defence that did not allow an opposition offensive touchdown in their last six games which included the Eastern 2 games total Final and the Grey Cup Game.

Dave initially started as an offensive tight end for the Ti-Cats and then that evolved into playing both offence and defence and then eventually solely on the defensive side as a defensive end. This is where he became a member of one of the most fearsome and formidable front four defensive lines in Tiger Cat history. This infamous line was comprised of Billy Ray Locklin, John Barrow, Angelo Mosca and Dave Viti.

Dave mentioned that the teams outside linebackers, Zeno Karz and Bob Krouse deserved a lot of credit to the successes of the defence. He said, "how could the front four not play well with trusting linebackers like them watching their backs".

The Tiger Cats had a number of great successes in the 1960s and Dave said this was because the players had complete confidence in themselves and in each other. They understood each other's abilities and capabilities. Another reason was due to the coaching of Ralph Sazio who demanded the absolute best out of each and every player.

There were so many great players Dave mentioned he had the good fortune to play with, Pete Neumann he described as being relentless when pursuing opposition players from sideline to sideline. He described Willie Bethea as a real grinding running back, Art Baker as a big tough fullback, the talented Garney Henley who could play anywhere, the hard nose Gene Ceppetelli, the great Angelo Mosca and John Barrow who was his roommate during the road trips.



Then Dave made special mention of Joe Zuger. He said that although Zuger was soft spoken off the field he was assertive and in charge on the field. He was no doubt the team's leader and according to Dave it is totally unbelievable that Joe Zuger has not been inducted into the Canadian Football Hall of Fame. He stated that he wanted this point included in this article. He said that he feels that Zuger has been shunned because of his low key demeanor. He continued to say that Zuger never possessed a large ego and never searched out for recognition or popularity; he simply carried himself as a leader and was exceedingly successful at doing just that.

In conclusion, Dave expressed his strong admiration for the strong unity, enthusiasm and support of the fans and for the City of Hamilton as a whole. He said that diversity in the ethnic culture was a mosaic of Hamilton. He remembered how Mayor Copps so strongly supported the football institution in Hamilton and how the local radio station at the time, CKOC, would regularly hold Quarterback Club events that the players were invited to attend and be able to inter-relate with their fans.

It was obvious during our conversation how Dave Viti deeply enjoyed his time in Hamilton and as a Tiger Cat.

Dave Viti is another great former player whose exploits on the gridiron has contributed to this City's rich football tradition. It was again a distinct pleasure to have had the opportunity to talk to another outstanding Ti-Cat legend.

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.