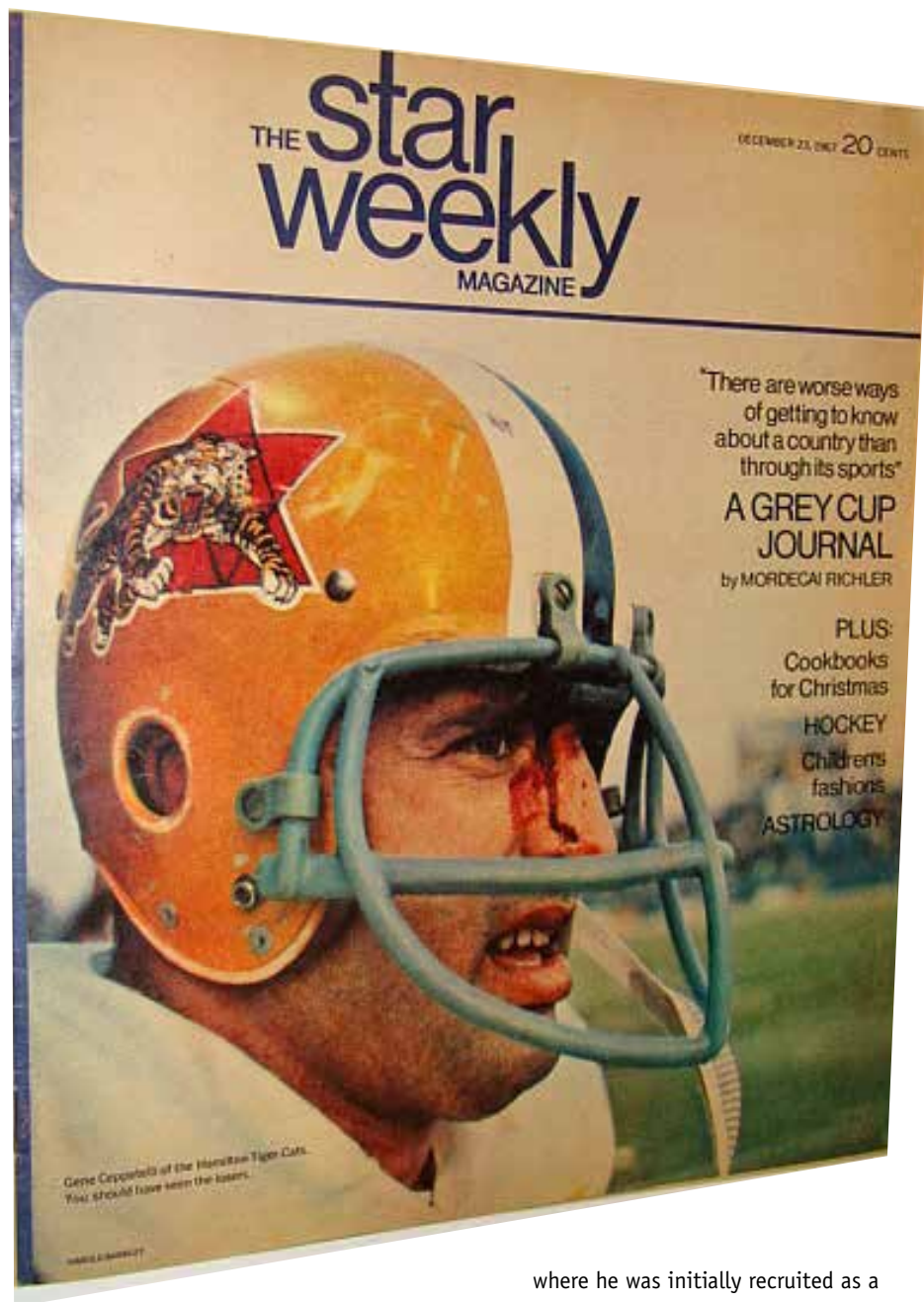


In Conversation With... Gene Ceppetelli

By Chris Durka



I recently had an enlightening conversation with Ti-Cat great Gene Ceppetelli, a two time CFL Eastern All-Star in 1967 and 1970 and Grey Cup Champion with Hamilton in 1963, '65 and '67. Gene was originally from a rural community just outside Sudbury, Ontario called Waters Township. After high school he attended Villanova University in Pennsylvania

where he was initially recruited as a running back but due to his aggressive head butting running style, he was converted to the offensive centre's position.

Upon graduating from University, Gene had an opportunity to try out for an NFL team but Jim Trimble; the Hamilton coach at the time intervened and invited him to attend the Tiger-Cat spring training camp instead. Trimble had been scouting Gene and was impressed with his performance particularly in the 1962 Liberty Bowl game. Hamilton already owned Gene's Canadian territorial rights so there were

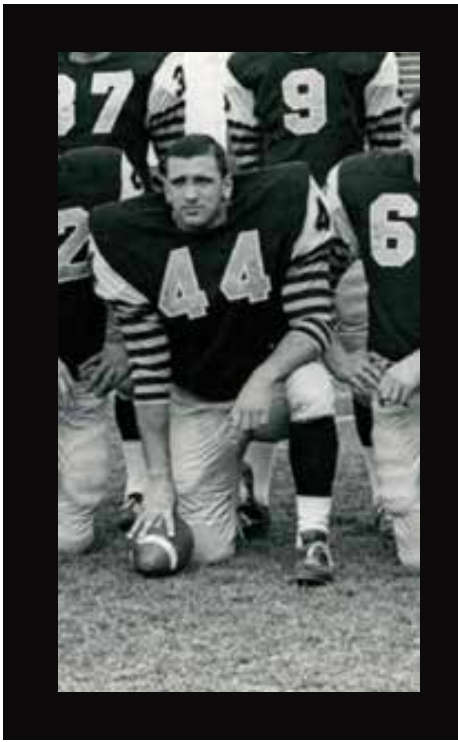
no complications in signing him to a contract.

Gene made the 1963 Hamilton Tiger Cats as a defensive tackle and as a backup centre. In his rookie year he won a Grey Cup Championship which he stated was one of his many highlights. He mentioned how great the people back in Sudbury reacted and celebrated his accomplishment.

During that game he was involved in the infamous Angelo Mosca tackle that knocked the Lions outstanding running back Willie Fleming out of the game and labelled Mosca as the meanest player in the CFL. Ironically it was Gene who initially tackled Fleming and according to Gene, all Mosca did was exactly what he was supposed to do and that was to assist on the tackle. Gene went on to say that in conversation afterwards, Mosca stated that it wasn't his intent to hurt Fleming or, for that matter any other player, because like him they all have to make a living.

Although he was recruited by Jim Trimble, Gene never got to play for him because in 1963 Trimble moved on to Montreal and Ralph Sazio became the Ti-Cat coach. Like previous players that played for Sazio, Gene described him as a no nonsense coach whose emphasis was focused on a hard work ethic and a dedication to achieve the ultimate goal of winning. He went on to say that Sazio was a CFL version of a Vince Lombardi type coach. He said that Sazio never yelled but spoke firmly to the players. If the coach noticed something that a player was doing wrong he would call that player into his office and go over it with the player and not call him out in front of his team mates. Another strong quality that Sazio possessed was how he would study game films so intensively that he would be able to figure out the other teams plays by detecting simple signs which the other team didn't even realize that they were doing. These detected signs would give away their plays and Gene said that during a game situation against Ottawa, when their players were coming off the field, Gene overheard them say to each other that Hamilton knows their playbook.

Gene said that there were numerous memorable moments during his football career in Hamilton. The obvious was playing in 4 Grey Cup Games with Hamilton and



winning 3 of them but what he valued and stressed the most over and over was having the opportunity to play with his Ti-Cat team mates. He said that they were successful because they played as a team; there were no individuals on those teams. He said that they believed and supported in each other which developed a never say die winning attitude. He went on to say that the veterans on the team such as Ang Mosca, Pete Neumann, Zeno Karcz just to mention a few, would stay after practice to mentor and help him become a better player. He said that there was nothing selfish about these great players that he played with and that is why the team unity was so strong. When you made a good play the veterans on the team would acknowledge it and if you made a bad play the veterans would not criticize you but they would help you to prevent it from happening again.

Gene mentioned Jake Gaudaur who masterminded outstanding trades in which the Ti-Cats acquired player such as Teddy Page, Billy Ray Locklin, Chuck Walton, Billy Wayte and Hal Patterson. He said that Gaudaur traded for players with heart and players that he knew would fit in with the character of the Ti-Cats.

Gene stated that when he played offensive centre he was fortunate to play with outstanding guards such as Ellison Kelly, Chuck Walton and Jon Hohman. He mentions the leadership of Angelo Mosca who he bunked with. The hard-nosed players like Ralph Goldston, John

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GENE WAS
SELECTED TO THE
ALL-EASTERN TEAM
IN 1970.



GENE FUT UNE
ÉTOILE DE L'EST
EN 1970.

**GENE
CEPPETELLI**

Non-Import
6'1"—205 lbs.
Centre

Canadien
6'1"—205 lb.
Centre

Ceppetelli came out of Sudbury to play for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats in 1963 and over the next five seasons established himself as one of the top Centres in the CFL.

Ceppetelli quitta Sudbury pour jouer pour les Tiger-Cats de Hamilton en 1963; durant les cinq saisons qui suivirent, il établit sa réputation comme l'un des meilleurs centres de la L.C.F.

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Barrow and Dave Fleming and also the leadership of his quarterback Joe Zuger. He said that Joe Zuger off the field was soft spoken but on the field and in the huddle his character changed and he firmly asserted himself, always making his point well known.

I raised the question about the frozen field conditions at Landsdowne Park for the 1967 Grey Cup game and Gene said that a number of players had to change from their cleats to running shoes during the course of that game. He also pointed out the importance of Bob Krouse's interception in the end zone in that game. Saskatchewan was driving and not only did that interception prevent them from scoring it was a game changer because Hamilton never looked back after that and went on to win the Grey Cup.

Gene went on after 1967 to play in the NFL for the Philadelphia Eagles for two years and the New York Giants for one year. He said

that those teams were not successful because unlike the Hamilton players that played as a team, the NFL players played as individuals, showing no unity as a team.

Gene returned to the CFL in 1970 and '71 to play for J.I. Albrecht and the Montreal Alouettes where he won another Grey Cup in 1970.

After football Gene settled south of the border in Pennsylvania where he eventually started his own business. He still kept in contact with football by coaching a local younger age minor league team. He not only taught them football skills but encouraged the kids to follow their dreams and strive to be the best at what they choose to do.

It was indeed a pleasure once again to have had this opportunity and honour to talk to another great former Hamilton Tiger Cat Legend.

