

TICATS ARE GOING WHERE THEY'VE DESERVED TO GO ALL SEASON ... THE GREY CUP

Hamilton rolls into Calgary with best chance to end 20-year drought

There is some football justice after all.

A team like the 2019 Hamilton Tiger-Cats should be going to the Grey Cup, a madcap audience which responded to the team's request by wearing all black — was there anyone in the stands who wasn't part of this theatre noir? — should be rewarded with a 10th victory at home in the 10th game there this season, and a city which has recently battled so much should be rewarded with something historically familiar to pin its civic pride to.

You didn't have to actually be in the cauldron of passion that was Tim Hortons Field Sunday to feel the reciprocal love between a Football Town and the franchise that over 150 years has become synonymous with it, but that was where you wanted to be. It was a send-off to the Grey Cup like no other. Amped up fans roaring with every big play, which was a lot of roaring because as they've done all of this outlier season, the Ticats made so many more of them than their opponents.

The Edmonton Eskimos had the ball longer, but the Tiger-Cats had the scoreboard longer. All game.

Ergo, after building an early 13-0 lead on the ultimately overmatched visitors, the Ticats prevailed 36-16 for their seventh straight win, the last six decisive ones.

Following a 15-3 regular season record which was so far ahead of anything any Ticat team has ever done it's mind-numbing, the Tiger-Cats now get to play for a 17th next Sunday in Calgary.

And they're still acting like they haven't done anything yet ... except for a few more emotional I-love-you-man's as the final whistle blew.

"I have never been on a team this close," said Brandon Banks, the CFL's most outstanding player finalist who made two astounding and game-altering catches.

"I have never been on a team this good," said linebacker Simoni Lawrence, the top defensive player finalist.

They and the other marquee players made big plays: Bralon Addison, Ja'Gared Davis, Ted Laurent, Frankie Williams, Lirim Hajrullahu, among them. But so did many lesser known to the general public like safety Tunde Adeleke, linebacker Justin Tuggle, and receivers Anthony Coombs and Jaelon Acklin. And more.

Led by Orlando Steinauer, who made a big play the last time the Ticats won the Grey Cup which is so last-century now, the coaching staff made adjustment after adjustment. Not just Sunday but all season long. They put good players in position to make even better plays.

Now they've a real good chance to become the city's first Cup champions since 1999, despite losing their starting quarterback a third of the way in. Dane Evans has become so trusted by everyone, it's easy to forget that he was here only to play second-string and learn from Jeremiah Masoli.

Evans was among the many who paid tribute to the 13th man, and there were

25,177 of them — why not set another record on the way out? — some of whom had been tailgating since just after dawn and most of whom were all in full-throated braying mode.

They were aflame from the start, ignited by a stunning inspirational video that touched all the 150-year bases.

And the black clothing and gold pom-poms? Oh, the players, focused as they clearly were,

"I'll never forget that sight, all 360 degrees you looked," Evans said.

"Holy crap, that was amazing, every time you made a tackle," said the inimitable Lawrence making a roaring sound.

"It went inside of you."

And now this team stands just one win from being the greatest in Ticat history. noticed it all right and they drank from it like a well.

- Steve Milton

