

FOOTBALL

Bye Week - A look back at the birth of ABNFF

BY LAWRENCE THOMAS

HAMILTON— With the Cat's out of town in Calgary, A Beautiful Night for Football took advantage of a much needed bye week.

It's hard to imagine that just a few weeks ago, ABNFF did not exist.

Now, I have a blog, 3 stories, an inbox full of photos that football fans from across Canada have sent me, and in conjunction with Part IV of this series, a new website is born.

When I originally started to storyboard this series, I had intended on writing a story each week - including taking ABNFF on the road when the Tiger-Cats were out of town.

As the Calgary game approached last week, I realized I was not going to be able to make the trip west. I struggled to find an angle for a game I could not attend, as it was important that I fulfilled my self prescribed obligation to write one story a week. I also knew I had to spend some time getting the website developed, but what was most important to me, were the stories themselves.

While the Cats were away, I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to reflect on the season, as football teams do during a bye week. To look at what I have accomplished, where I needed to improve, and to put together a solid game plan before the hometown team took to the field again in week 5.

With my plan of attack in place, and concepts for the website going much better than I had anticipated, I still struggled with an angle for this week's story. As I watched the cursor blink at me inside a blank blog window, I suddenly realized this would be the perfect opportunity to talk about where A Beautiful Night for Football originated, and what the future held.

As I write this, I am sitting half awake in front of what's left of last night's campfire. There is no one around. My family (and surprising enough my daughter), are still asleep. The snap, crackle of the charred remnants of a log still emit a soft stream of smoke into the damp morning air. The birds are waking. The trees that completely encircle this paradise glisten from the previous night's rainfall. The skies are painted

a solid coat of summer blue. A lady bug explores the outer edges of my notebook as I scribble down these thoughts. Even in the presence of mother's natures Robert Batemen, I can't seem to get football out of my head.

The 2008 season opener in my Hometown Hamilton, is where ABNFF truly began. It actually came about by accident.

As that first game against Montreal progressed, as the score became lopsided and the fans grew hostile, I found myself looking for something positive to take from that evening.

By the time the final whistle blew, I had an idea for a story I wanted to write. I am not sure why I felt the sudden urgency to complete that 1st story, but it was 3 o'clock in the morning when I put the finishing touches on part 1 of this series. I had no idea who my audience was going to be, but the fact that I was inspired to stay up and write into the early morning hours, meant that this story was something my heart yearned to tell.

It was the fans leaving the stadium half way through the 4th quarter opening night, that challenged me to put pen to paper as I watched their dejected faces pile out of Ivor Wynne.

In that first game, were reflections of previous seasons. Getting blown away. Undisciplined, penalties. All in all, a very frustrating game to watch for Ti-Cat fans. This season was supposed to be promising. We weren't picked to win the Grey Cup or anything, but the signs would be there that this team was headed in the right direction.

There were some positives to take from this relatively new squad, but what I looked at when covering that story, was what surrounded me. It wasn't the opening crowd we had hoped for, but you couldn't have asked for a better night. It was warm right up until that final whistle blew and most of all, Football was in the air again in Canada. It truly was A Beautiful Night for Football.

That was it. That realization at the end of the game, that there was more to football, more to this game, than a

win, the score, or all the stats in the world.

That is where A Beautiful Night for Football was born.

For the first three weeks, ABNFF lived in forums mostly populated by Tiger-Cat fans, and amongst friends on my Facebook.

Eventually, I started broadening my network and by the time Part III – A New Generation was born, I was networking with Canadian Football fans from across Canada. I was finding my audience.

Originally, my focus was to cover this series based on games played in my hometown Ivor Wynne Stadium. How could I make each game a unique experience?

After visiting Toronto for their home opener, I began thinking *'What if I took to the road to share with fans, what was so special about this league? Blogged about it, posted photo journals, and wrote a weekly story about my adventures across Canada - writing about the only professional sport that is truly Canadian?'*

This series is meant to showcase what is beautiful about our game, and why in times when our teams are rebuilding and the NFL is knocking on our door, it is imperative to continue to show our colors, and remember why football is such an important part of our community.

I truly believe there is no time like now, to present this sport from every angle, and to exhibit what is special about the CFL. Why this game is worth saving.

Where does ABNFF go from here? Wherever we want it to.

I look forward to meeting many more of you, hearing your suggestions, and seeing more of your photos and the stories that come with them.

It's FRIDAY, and time for Friday Night Football in the Hammer.

See you around the game.

A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT FOR FOOTBALL