

Looking Back... The *Rods* First Season



Photo credit: Winnipeg Free Press

This photo was taken after the first ever **Rods** game on Saturday, September 21st, 1946 and was published in the **Winnipeg Free Press** the following Monday on page 15. **Rods** players (l to r) are **Freddie Miller**, **Jordan Ethans**, **Gordie Simpson** and **Harry Cholakis**. It said they "all played well."

In August of 1946 the **Winnipeg Free Press** announced that Junior Football, or rugby football as it was called then, was making a return to **Osborne Stadium** for Winnipeg's first post-war season. (Most men in the Junior Football age group enlisted during the World War II years.) A small three team league was formed, consisting of the **Weston Monarchs**, **North End Grads** and the **Fort Rouge Rods**.

The **North End Grads** (eventually renamed the **Winnipeg Grads**) would recruit graduates from **St. John's Tech**, **Lord Selkirk** and the powerhouse **Isaac Newton** high school teams. **Weston** would draw heavily from graduating stars from another perennial high school football winner, **Daniel McIntyre High School**.

The **Fort Rouge Rods** would get their players from **St. Paul's College** (located a block north of **The Bay** in those days), **Gordon Bell** and **Kelvin Tech**.

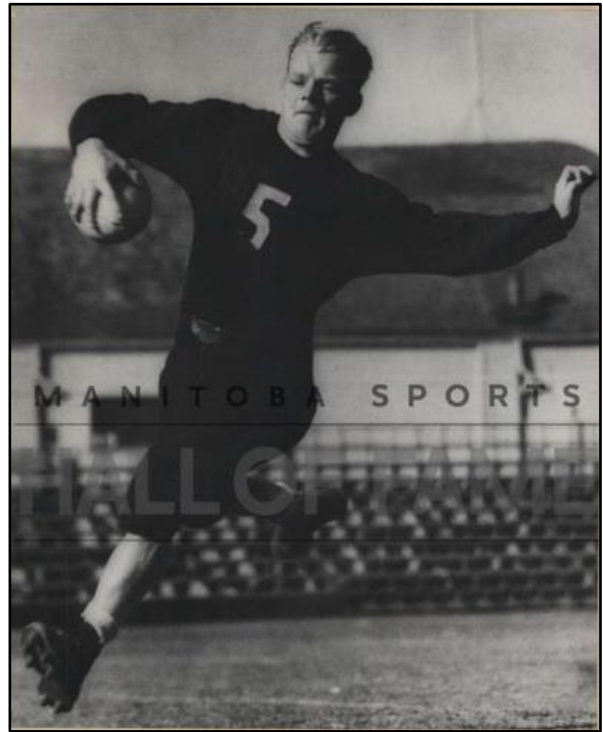


Photo credit: Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame

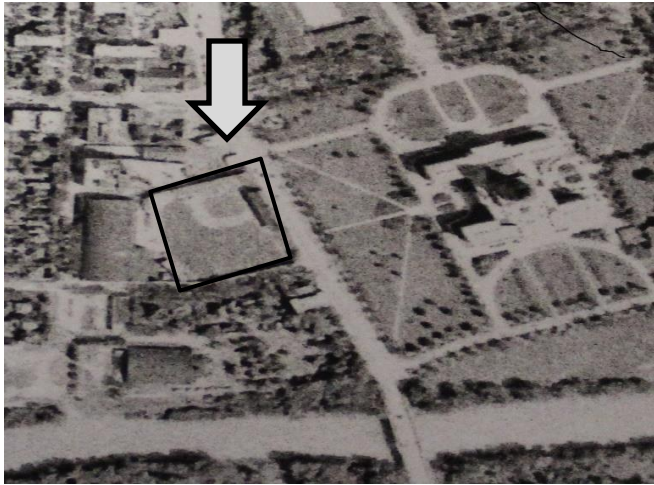
Fritz Hanson pictured "galloping" at the **Osborne Stadium**. In the background is the **Amphitheatre** which hosted a number of hockey's **Memorial** and **Allen Cups**.

Coaching the **Rods** in their inaugural season was the **Blue Bombers** legend, **Fritz Hanson**. **Hanson** played on the first team from Western Canada to win the **Grey Cup**, the 1935 **Winnipeg 'Pegs**. (It wouldn't be until sometime in 1936, that **Winnipeg Tribune** sports writer **Vince Leah** would invent the **Blue Bomber** nickname.)

Hanson, known as "Twinkle Toes", "The Galloping Ghost" and "The Perham Pellet" (he was from Perham, Minnesota) played for the **Bombers** in the '37, '38, '39 and 1941 **Grey Cup** games winning the championship again in 1939 and 1941.

The 1946 Junior Rugby Football season had a simple schedule featured the teams playing each other twice with a two-game total point semi-final and final.

The *Rods* First Season... continued



An image from an aerial photograph taken in 1949. **Osborne Stadium** is located to the left of the **Legislative Building** on the west side of **Osborne Street**. A baseball diamond is visible in the northeast corner".

The **Rods** went down to defeat to the **Weston Monarchs** in the season opener, but that would be their only loss in league play.

1946 Junior Rugby Football Results:

Sat. Sep. 21 st	Monarchs 6 – Rods 2
Thu. Sep. 25 th	Rods 6 – Grads 1
Wed. Oct 2 nd	Monarchs 14 – Grads 7
Sat. Oct. 5 th	Rods 3 – Monarchs 1
Thu. Oct. 10 th	Rods 17 – Grads 13
Mon. Oct. 14 th	Grads beat Weston

*all games played @ Osborne Stadium

The season ended with the **Rods** in first place with a record of 3 & 1, **Monarchs** were 2 & 2 and the **Grads** ended with a 1 & 3 record.

This meant the **Monarchs** played the **Grads** in a two-game total point semi-final. The first game on October 17th ended in a 6-6 tie but **Weston** dominated the game on the 19th with an 18 - 6 victory for an aggregate win of 24 -12 and the right to play the **Rods** in the final.



Photo credit: Winnipeg Free Press

The **Fort Rouge Rods** celebrate after winning the League Championship. **Coach Hanson** is in the middle of the front row, one of many showing the already famous "clenched fist".

Game One of the finals took place on October 22nd, meaning the **Monarchs** were playing their fifth game in nine days! The exhausted team from **Weston** was no match for the **Rods**, who shut out the **Monarchs** 8 – 0. The final game was on Thursday, October 24th and the **Rods** held a 10 - 0 lead at the half, meaning they were up 18 – 0. With the game in hand the **Rods** let-up in the second and the **Weston** team found their "second wind" and rallied to defeat the **Rods** 16 – 13. It wasn't enough as the **Rods** were crowned champions winning the series 21 - 16!

To finish the season the **Rods** travelled to **Calgary** to play the **West End Tornadoes**, an undefeated team the paper called "one of the greatest junior football clubs ever assembled in western Canada." The **Rods** actually led the game 6 – 0 at the half, but the **Tornadoes** scored 18 unanswered points to win the game 18 – 6. The **Rods** would have to wait a few more years to become Western Canadian and National Champions... but what a start!

About That Clenched Fist

The **Winnipeg Free Press** often wrote about the **Rods** in glowing terms back in '46. It seems the team piqued the interest of Winnipeg's south side with their unique name and the "clenched fist" greeting the team loved to flash.

Here's the history of the "clenched fist", from a story published on October 10th in the **Free Press**. The story quotes **Louis "Chick" O'Connell** who was the manager of the football club.

"Chick says it all started back in 1923 at the CPR ticket office, where four well-known athletes hit on the idea for a greeting which would interpret a symbol of athletic strength and friendship. The four were Vic Lindquist, who gained hockey fame with Winnipeg's Olympic team in 1932, Lorne "Windy" Lyndon, a popular fastball and hockey ref, Brian O'Connell and Frank Cook, who is still with the CPR office. Little did they dream that the idea would blossom forth into such apparent prominence as it enjoys today. Winnipeggers, particularly in Ft. Rouge and River Heights now seem to get an amusing kick out of flashing this odd salutation. ...many families, mothers and fathers in all think nothing of including the Rods symbol in carrying out their everyday routine. The grid team's coach, famous Fritz Hanson is a firmly entrenched Rod who utilizes the symbol freely during game pep talks."

The same story also noted that the **Rods** were more than just a football club. There was already a **Rods** basketball team that competed in the **Winnipeg Intermediate Basketball League** and a **Rods** touring baseball team was formed in the summer of '45.

Season #1 Tidbits

- **Fritz Hanson** set a **Grey Cup** record for the longest punt return for a **TD** in the 1935 game. His record 78-yard run held until 1976... beaten by a 79-yard TD run.
- **Jovon Johnson** holds the modern day record for **Most Punt Return Yards in a Grey Cup** game with **118** vs **BC** in 2011. However, it's about one-third of the yards that **Hanson** amassed in the **1935 Grey Cup** game when **Hanson** had over **300** punt return yards!!!
- In '46, TDs were only good for **five** points and forward passes were rare.
- The quarterback of **Calgary's West End Tornados** team that defeated the **Rods** in '46 was **Pete Lougheed**. He went on to play two seasons with the **Eskimos**, but he is better known for being the **Premier of Alberta** for 14 years. If you've ever visited **Kananaskis** you've been in the **Alberta Provincial Park** that bears his name.
- In attendance at the '46 **Rods** end of season stag in December 1946 were **J. O. Blick** and **Jack Wells**. **Blick's** new radio station **CJOB** was just nine months old at the time. "**Cactus**" **Jack Wells**, would go on to create the "Happy Honker Award" and become a football broadcasting legend on '**OB**.
- **Fritz Hanson** came out of retirement in 1947 and joined the **Calgary Stampeders**. In 1948 he won another **Grey Cup** as the **Stamps** went undefeated on the season. The autographed cartoon of **Hanson** in our trophy case is about his comeback in **Calgary**.
- One of the fathers' of the "clenched-fist", **Vic Lindquist**, a member of the 1932 Olympic gold medal winning hockey team from Winnipeg, named one of his sons... **Rod**.