

Edwardsville resident Charbonneau coaches in Canadian Football League

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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MONTREAL – The life of a football coach can be fairly nomadic. Coaches, especially those who are building their careers, often move from place to place every couple of years or so.

It's a calling that can often be difficult for those with families.

For Paul Charbonneau, an Edwardsville resident, it's also something that can open horizons for his young family, horizons that can mean quite a bit down the road for them.

The reason is simple: Charbonneau, who is a native of the Canadian national capital of Ottawa, is the offensive line coach for the Canadian Football League's Montreal Alouettes under the Alouettes' head coach, Jacques Chapeldine.

“I started coaching in eastern Canada,” Charbonneau said. “I've coached in western Pennsylvania, and North Dakota before I went to Avila College (in Kansas City) to coach. I've moved a lot for jobs, but my wife (Lindsay) is a professor and a sports psychologist at SIU-Edwardsville.”

Charbonneau attended Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, one of Canada's Atlantic provinces, and began his coaching career there before going to coach at the University of North Dakota, Saint Francis University and Valley City State University in Pennsylvania before heading to Kansas City to coach at Avila as an assistant head coach, running game coordinator and offensive line coach. During that time, he was a guest coach during June training camp sessions for five different CFL teams from 2007-11.

Charbonneau grew up as a fan of Ottawa's two previous CFL teams, the Rough Riders and the Renegades. “My family had season tickets to the Rough Riders (who were one of the CFL's most successful teams in the 1960s and 70s),” Charbonneau said. “It was fun going to their games.”

Before going to the Alouettes, Charbonneau coached for two years with the CFL's Winnipeg Blue Bombers, getting to experience up close one of the CFL's biggest rivalries between the Blue Bombers and the Saskatchewan Roughriders – especially the traditional Labour Day weekend Classic in Regina and the return game the following week, a game that has become known as the Banjo Bowl, in Winnipeg. “Those are some of the most exciting games in the season,” Charbonneau said of the home-and-home games the first part of September.

While American and Canadian football are very similar games, the rules differences between the American and Canadian game – the Canadian field being longer and wider, three downs to get 10 yards, 12 men each on the field – require a much different approach to game strategy. “Most of both games are similar in the way things happen,” Charbonneau said. “You have to take a different approach with three downs instead of four downs; it's a faster-paced game and you have to be in better shape because of the fast pace of Canadian football.

With the CFL season starting with training camps in June and the regular season opening in late June or early July and running through the last weekend in November with the Grey Cup – Canada's Super Bowl – just when schools are letting out in Edwardsville for the year. “I have my wife and kids here in Montreal for the summer,” Charbonneau said. “They do get to experience what it's like to be in a different country, but I've lived in the United States for the past 11 years and life isn't that much different in the States and in Canada.

“I do get to be with my family during the off-season and recharge; I'm able to do some research at home and be with my family. Montreal's a really good city; there's a lot of history here.”

One of the perks Charbonneau has is being able to coach with one of the greatest quarterbacks of all time – American or Canadian football – in Anthony Calvillo, who holds the North American professional record of most passing yardage in a career, 79,816 yards, along with 455 touchdown passes in 9,437 attempts. “Anthony's a great guy,” Charbonneau said. “I'm glad to be working with him.”

The Alouettes stand at 2-2 on the season thus far, having won their season opener at home 17-16 to the Roughriders but dropping decisions to the Edmonton Eskimos (23-19) and British Columbia Lions of Vancouver (23-16) before defeating the Calgary Stampeders 30-23 last week at home; the Als will be in Ottawa to take on the defending Grey Cup champion Redblacks Wednesday night before going to Winnipeg to face the Blue Bombers July 27.

As always, the goal for the Alouettes is to reach the Grey Cup; this year's 105th Grey Cup will take place Nov. 26 at TD Place in Ottawa. “That would be great if we could make the Grey Cup in my hometown,” Charbonneau said.

CFL games are shown on the ESPN family of networks and also available on the streaming WatchESPN app during the season. The Alouettes' web site is www.en.montrealalouettes.com.

