

= Canadian Football League in the United States =

The Canadian Football League (CFL) , the sole major professional sports league in the United States and Canada to feature only teams from Canada , has made efforts to gain further audience in the United States , most directly through expansion into the country from 1993 to 1995 . The CFL plays Canadian football , which is somewhat different from the American football usual in the United States .

The first American team , the Sacramento Gold Miners , joined in 1993 . The league expanded to four American teams in 1994 and five in 1995 . In the latter year , the teams were aligned into a new South Division . The three years saw numerous franchise moves , foldings , and ownership debacles on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border . The Baltimore Stallions became the only American @-@ based team to win the Grey Cup championship , in 1995 .

With the exception of Baltimore , the American teams consistently lost money . CFL games in the United States by its American teams averaged 10 @,@ 000 to 15 @,@ 000 in paid attendance , while the Stallions ranged from 30 @,@ 000 to 37 @,@ 000 . (At the time , the CFL was a gate @-@ driven league) . Tension also arose between the American and Canadian contingents over rule changes , scheduling , import rules , and even the name of the league itself . Facing these difficulties , the league again fielded only Canadian teams beginning in 1996 .

While expansion was the most notable CFL effort in the United States , the league had also made previous inroads . Eleven neutral @-@ site CFL games (including exhibition games) have been held in the United States , while National Football League (NFL) teams have been invited northward for interleague play . The CFL has also attempted to find a television audience in the United States , most notably during an NFL players ' strike in 1982 , and more recently on ESPN .

= = Pre @-@ expansion era = =

Until 1993 the Canadian Football League , and its predecessor associations , had always operated solely within Canada , despite most professional leagues in North America being cross @-@ border enterprises . The substantially different rules and fields of the Canadian and American games and the popularity of the National Football League and NCAA Division I @-@ A football in the United States were generally seen to inhibit the chances of any sort of expansion into the United States . Lackluster CFL television ratings in the United States during the 1982 NFL strike seemed to bolster this argument .

= = Neutral site games = =

There had been a degree of cross @-@ fertilization between Canadian and American leagues earlier in the 20th century . A number of CFL ? NFL interleague games were held in Canada . As well , eleven neutral @-@ site CFL games have been played on American soil . The earliest of these dates to 1909 , while the bulk occurred between 1951 and 1967 . The 1909 game , featuring the Ottawa Rough Riders and Hamilton Tigers , was sponsored by the New York Herald and played at a park in the Bronx ; this in the era when the Canadian game was more similar to rugby football and did not feature modern rules such as the forward pass . The next game , a 1951 match @-@ up between the Hamilton Tiger @-@ Cats and Toronto Argonauts in Buffalo , was billed as the first true all @-@ Canadian game played in the United States and drew more than 18 @,@ 000 , a decent crowd for the era . In 1958 , Hamilton defeated Ottawa in a regular @-@ season contest in front about 15 @,@ 000 in Philadelphia 's cavernous Municipal Stadium , 24 ? 18 . It remains the only CFL game played outside Canada , involving two Canadian teams , that actually counted in the standings .

The American Pacific Northwest became a frequent site for games in the 1950s and 1960s . Western Canadian teams , particularly the BC Lions , were most often called upon to entertain their regional neighbours . News reports from the time suggest a hybrid game of three down Canadian ball played on the more restricted 100 yard American field . One BC ? Winnipeg matchup in 1960

was held not on the west coast but in Cedar Rapids , Iowa , presumably because both teams had a number of former University of Iowa stars , including Willie Mitchell , who scored the Lions ' only touchdown in a 13 ? 7 loss in front of 12 @, @ 583 .

Games tended to be characterized by low scores and frequent punting , with crowds between 10 @, @ 000 and 20 @, @ 000 ; these numbers dropped off in the last two games of the era . A low scoring BC ? Calgary game in Everett , Washington in 1967 drew just over 6 @, @ 000 ; there would not be another CFL game in the United States until the cusp of US expansion itself in 1992 .

= = = Television = = =

The idea of attracting American fans through television has long been a goal of the CFL although the results have been intermittent . As early as 1954 , the Interprovincial Rugby Football Union (forerunner of the CFL 's East Division) struck a deal with NBC that lasted a year and featured 13 games . The infamous Fog Bowl of 1962 was ? at least until play was suspended ? broadcast by ABC . Over subsequent years various non @-@ major networks picked up an assortment of games .

The fledgling ESPN signed a deal in 1981 for 30 CFL regular season games and the playoffs , and CFL games became a fixture of the early years of the network . The next year , after NFL players went on strike in September , the CFL got another chance at major network exposure when NBC bought out the ESPN rights for \$ 100 @, @ 000 a game to make up for its lost football programming . NBC would air CFL games on Sunday afternoons with full NFL production values and announcing crews . However , every one of the four matches shown was a blowout and ratings were a major disappointment . NBC quickly backed out of the arrangement .

= = Expansion = =

= = = Background = = =

The idea of expansion into the United States began to take shape in the early 1990s , prompted by precarious ownership situations and chronic money shortages amongst the existing Canadian teams . The chief catalyst of the league 's struggles was Carling O 'Keefe brewery 's decision to stop their lucrative television sponsorship in 1987 . The arrangement had provided steady income to all of the league 's teams , reaching \$ 11 million per season before its withdrawal . The guaranteed revenues , instead of being used to grow the league , had subsidized outdated and shoddy financial practices and marketing both at the team and league level . It would take two decades for economic equilibrium to again be reestablished .

With the exception of the Edmonton Eskimos , every team in the league had faced some kind of crisis in the years leading up to 1993 . In the 1980s , the Montreal team folded twice , while the Calgary Stampeders and publicly owned Saskatchewan Roughriders had to mount public campaigns to survive . By 1993 , the BC Lions had experienced years of ownership chaos and the Winnipeg Blue Bombers faced \$ 3 million in debt , despite frugal management .

The Toronto Argonauts were embroiled in a series of ownership crises after the initially successful ownership triumvirate of Bruce McNall , Wayne Gretzky , and John Candy faced mounting financial losses . The Hamilton Tiger @-@ Cats were confronting an attendance swoon , fan malaise , and struggling community ownership . Both Ontario teams faced competition at the gate and for general attention from the Buffalo Bills of the NFL , then in the middle of their run of four consecutive Super Bowl appearances . The Ottawa Rough Riders and their fans were being treated to disappointing squads on the field and constant drama off the field from its under @-@ capitalized and mercurial owner , Bernie Gliberman .

Against this economic backdrop a new generation of venture capitalist owners had emerged , taking the place of the community groups , local consortiums , or philanthropists that typically had owned the teams and operated them without any serious profit motive . They were led by McNall in

Toronto , Larry Ryckman in Calgary , and Gliberman in Ottawa . Larry Smith was hired as league commissioner in February 1992 , reportedly on the explicit understanding that he would pursue American expansion . While Smith would become the most visible face of the era , he makes clear that it was the owners who drove the initiative , particularly McNall and Ryckman . McNall 's issues with cash flow , later revealed to be the result of his wealth being inflated by illegal accounting , were one obvious instigator . While expansion was championed by the newer owners , equal distribution of the expansion fees also appealed to the community owned teams to shore up their finances .

== 1992 ? 1993 ==

With the green light from the owners , Smith began the task of expanding the league across the border , beginning with a June 1992 exhibition game between the Argos andStampeders in Portland , Oregon . A total of 15 @, @ 362 attended , close to the averages later American teams would post . Portland was seriously considered for a franchise , but investors failed to emerge . The expansion announcement prompted numerous applications from a wide variety of American cities . By the end of the expansion era , a minimum of 22 cities are reported to have been considered for teams .

Coincidentally , the World League of American Football , an attempt by the NFL to create a spring league in major markets without NFL teams , suspended its North American operations after its 1992 season . WLAF owners Fred Anderson of the Sacramento Surge and Larry J. Benson of the San Antonio Riders applied to join the CFL as the Sacramento Gold Miners and San Antonio Texans , respectively .

On January 13 , 1993 the league approved both franchises by a vote of 7 ? 1 , with Winnipeg dissenting . League owners also decided not to apply the requirement of 20 " non @-@ import " Canadian @-@ raised players to the American squads , fearing that the requirement would be a violation of US employment laws .

The experiment started on a sour note , however , when an ownership dispute forced Benson to pull San Antonio out on the same evening the franchise was to be formally introduced . Anderson decided to continue with the venture after Bensons 's withdrawal , but made clear that he did not want to be the only American franchise after 1993 .

The Gold Miners were placed in the very strong West Division and finished last with a record of 6 ? 12 . They played at the austere Hornet Stadium , located on the campus of Sacramento State University and averaged around 17 @, @ 000 fans per game , selling 9 @, @ 000 season tickets .

== 1994 ==

In 1994 the Gold Miners were joined by three other American teams : the Las Vegas Posse , the Baltimore CFL Colts and the Shreveport Pirates . On television ESPN and its subsidiary ESPN2 picked up some games alongside the usual broadcasting by TSN and CBC in Canada . Shreveport and Baltimore were placed in the Eastern Division , while Sacramento and Las Vegas wound up in the west . Another team was to have been added in Orlando , named either the Manatees or Sting Rays . However , in a debacle that had now become a pattern , the presumptive ownership group failed to appear at the press conference announcing their formation in January 1994 .

The Baltimore CFL Colts were in the headlines before even playing a down . Owned by Jim Speros , the team was marketed as a revival of the Baltimore Colts NFL franchise , who had left the city 10 years earlier and had also played at Memorial Stadium . The team 's embrace of the Colts ' history gained an instant following in Baltimore and headlines in the national sports media , although an injunction obtained shortly before the team 's first game forced the league to refer to the team as the " Baltimore CFLers " or " Baltimore Football Club " . Since Memorial Stadium had originally been built to accommodate baseball 's Baltimore Orioles as well as football , its playing surface was large enough to accommodate a full @-@ size Canadian field .

Baltimore was far and away the most successful of any American CFL team on the field and off , averaging crowds of over 37 @, @ 000 their first year . Knowing that Canadian football was

considerably different from the American game , Speros stocked the Stallions mostly with CFL veterans . As coach , he brought in Don Matthews , who had already played in two Grey Cups and won one . The result was a team that eventually finished second in the East with a 12 ? 6 record and became the first American team to qualify for the playoffs . They advanced all the way to the Grey Cup . In a thrilling match played in BC Place , the BC Lions defeated the Stallions on a last second field goal . Perhaps most remarkably , they were reported to have turned a profit in their first year after an initial US \$ 7 million investment by Speros .

The Shreveport Pirates were actually a transplanted of Bernie Gliberman and his organization from Ottawa . The Glibermans had hinted at moving the Rough Riders to the United States , making them even more unpopular than they already were in Canada 's capital . As part of a settlement with the CFL , Gliberman sold the Rough Riders to Bruce Firestone for CAN \$ 1 @. @ 85 million , and in return was granted a US @-@ based expansion team which became the Shreveport Pirates . As part of the deal , Gliberman not only had to pay the expansion fee , but also had to settle his previous Ottawa debts . Team attendance was average but saw a general upward trend : the home finale drew over 32 @, @ 000 fans to 40 @, @ 000 @-@ seat Independence Stadium , the highest for any U.S.-hosted CFL game outside Baltimore . There was a groundswell of local support for the team but also significant difficulties in their first year : stifling weather , cultural clashes , organizational screw @-@ ups , and serious hints of under @-@ capitalization (during training camp the team was housed in a dorm above a milking barn) . A woeful record did not help : the team lost their first 14 games en route to a 3 ? 15 record and last place in the East .

The Gold Miners , after spending much of 1993 adjusting to the Canadian game , rebounded strongly to finish 9 ? 8 ? 1 in their second season , one point short of the playoffs . They were led again by David Archer at quarterback , who had persisted with the team since its World League days as the Sacramento Surge . However , in what was to become a trend during the CFL expansion , the second Sacramento season saw an attendance decline .

At the other end of the spectrum , the Posse were an abject failure both on the field and off . Playing in Sam Boyd Stadium on the outskirts of the city and practicing on an ersatz practice field in the parking lot of the Riviera Hotel and Casino on the Las Vegas Strip , the team became infamous for botched gimmicks . Attendance was never good to begin with , but dropped to embarrassing levels as the season went on . With such dreadful gates , the team 's cash flow dwindled to the point that , according to one assistant coach , " we couldn 't even afford paper . " After only 2 @, @ 350 attended an October home game against Winnipeg , owner Nick Mileti announced the team was suspending operations . To avoid shuttering a team mid @-@ season , the league moved the Posse 's final home game to Edmonton . The team was little better on the field either , finishing 5 @-@ 13 ? the second @-@ worst record in the league (behind only the Pirates) .

= = = 1994 ? 1995 offseason = = =

The Las Vegas situation was one of a bevy of developments that absorbed the league in the 1994 to 1995 offseason . The team was not officially disbanded until April 1995 but not before the league damaged its credibility by twice giving provisional approval to a relocation to Jackson , Mississippi . A group from Miami , Florida tried to convince the league to let it buy the remains of the Posse and move them to South Florida as the Miami Manatees (CFL) in the Miami Orange Bowl . An exhibition game between Birmingham and Baltimore was held there in June 1995 to gauge support , which drew a decent crowd just above 20 @, @ 000 .

The Gold Miners grew increasingly dissatisfied with Hornet Stadium . Anderson blamed losses of US \$ 10 million over two years on the facility . After attempts to have Sacramento State upgrade or replace the facility failed , he announced in October 1994 ? with two weeks to go in the season ? that the Gold Miners would be playing elsewhere in 1995 . After attempting to move to Oakland , the team eventually moved to the Alamodome in San Antonio , Texas ; where they would play as the San Antonio Texans .

With the Posse folding , the Gold Miners moving , and the Pirates facing money troubles three of

the four CFL expansion teams had stumbled . The league , however , still managed to add two new cities before the 1995 season . The Memphis Mad Dogs were announced in November 1994 , followed by the Birmingham Barracudas in January 1995 . The Memphis deal was hailed as a large step forward for the league 's presence in the US as it brought in the marketing connections of Federal Express and the wealth of its founder Fred Smith .

= = = 1995 = = =

With the series of new additions , the league abandoned its longstanding East @-@ West divisional format . Instead , the five American teams ? Baltimore , Birmingham , Memphis , San Antonio , and Shreveport ? would be moved to a new South Division , while the eight Canadian teams moved to a North Division . The top five Canadian teams and top three American teams would qualify for the playoffs ; the lowest @-@ seeded North team would " cross over " to the South playoffs . The league gained its first national American television contract with ESPN2 , which agreed to televise more than 20 regular season games , plus the playoffs . The deal was reportedly worth about \$ 1 @. @ 5 million . The CFL would remain on the network until 1997 .

The Birmingham Barracudas , owned by insurance tycoon Art Williams , entered the league playing at Legion Field , which could accommodate a Canadian football field with 15 @-@ yard end zones . Led by future Hall of Fame member Matt Dunigan , the Barracudas fell short of the South Division title , but remained competitive throughout the year . Despite selling 2 @, @ 000 season tickets and facing community apathy after numerous attempts at pro football squads had failed in the city , attendance for the first three games exceeded expectations . Williams knew that the ' Cudas potentially faced serious attendance problems once the traditional American football season began , and persuaded the CFL to let them play their late @-@ season home games on Sunday afternoons to avoid competition with high school and Alabama / Auburn football . However , attendance still dropped to unsustainable levels ; none of the final four home games attracted more than 10 @, @ 000 people . Williams claimed to have lost at least US \$ 10 million on the season ? at least as much as his startup costs ? and blamed community apathy for the attendance woes .

Memphis had been a prime target for either expansion or relocation . Besides its location near Shreveport and San Antonio , in 1995 Fred Smith 's ownership group , which had narrowly missed out on an NFL team , was awarded a CFL team to begin play as the Memphis Mad Dogs . The Mad Dogs played in the Liberty Bowl , which had to be heavily reconfigured to accommodate the Canadian game . Astroturf sections were added around the grass field to accommodate the required width , while the expansion of the length of the field to 110 yards forced the end zones to become half Astroturf pentagons that averaged seven yards in the corners and fourteen yards behind the uprights . The grandstands stood mere yards from the end line , prompting veteran CFL quarterback Danny McManus to call the end zones " a lawsuit waiting to happen " . Even with the compromises made , it was later discovered that the Liberty Bowl grounds crew had marked 33 inch yards .

Like Williams , Smith knew the Mad Dogs would face an uphill battle attracting fans once the traditional American football season started . He persuaded the CFL to let them play their late @-@ season home games on Sundays to avoid competing against high school and Tennessee / Ole Miss football . It was to no avail ; late in the season the Mad Dogs struggled to attract more than 10 @, @ 000 people . Like Williams , Smith publicly blamed community apathy and media hostility for the lackluster attendance . The team went 9 ? 9 in their only year .

In Shreveport , meanwhile , the Pirates saw marginal improvement on the field and continued woes off it . Notable NFL quarterback Billy Joe Tolliver was signed and put up decent numbers despite a 5 ? 13 record . As elsewhere , the team saw a second season attendance decline . With the season winding down , the city had clearly soured on the Glieberrmans . They became embroiled in legal difficulties and , in one particularly absurd incident , Bernie Glieberrman had his lawyer attempt (unsuccessfully) to abscond with a half @-@ million dollar Tucker automobile that Glieberrman had donated to a local museum .

Freshly relocated from Sacramento , the San Antonio Texans finally found success on the field in 1995 playing in the brand new (and CFL regulation sized) Alamodome . The team continued to be

bankrolled by the enthusiastic Fred Anderson . Archer , entering his fifth year as Anderson 's quarterback , led the second best offence in the league ; he nevertheless suffered an injury late in the season , prompting the team to hire 45 @-@ year @-@ old Joe Ferguson (whom Stephenson had coached as a member of the Buffalo Bills) out of retirement to serve as a backup . They finished 12 ? 6 and finally made the playoffs . In the first round they trounced Birmingham , 51 ? 9 , before falling to the Baltimore Stallions , 21 ? 11 , in the South Division final . Team attendance was around the same level Anderson had previously seen in Sacramento .

The Baltimore franchise finally received a permanent name , the " Baltimore Stallions " . Led by Tracy Ham and Mike Pringle , the Stallions started 2 ? 3 , but then steamrolled through the rest of the season , winning 13 games in a row to finish first in the South Division . They knocked off Winnipeg and then San Antonio in the South Division final . They faced the Calgary Stampeders in the 1995 Grey Cup in Regina , Saskatchewan and won convincingly , 37 ? 20 . The first and only American team to take the championship , the 1995 Stallions team has since acquired a reputation as one of the CFL 's best ever . At the time , their .756 winning percentage over their first two seasons was the best start for an expansion team in North American professional sports history .

While the Stallions experienced a successful year on the field , and finished second to Edmonton in average attendance , the city 's excitement of 1994 died down . Attendance declined , with season ticket sales dropping to around 17 @, @ 000 . Later reports suggested that attendance numbers had been inflated by giveaways and the team projected some losses in 1995 . Despite these difficulties , the Stallions remained the model that lent expansion credibility ; other American owners looked to Baltimore in deciding on the future of their own teams .

= = = End of U.S. experiment = = =

= = = League troubles = = =

Despite some positive initial attendance numbers , after three years it was clear that general American fan interest in Canadian football was sparse . Canadian differences , such as three downs and the wider field had not been embraced south of the border . While the league had a small deal with ESPN2 , a major television contract had not materialized . There was no widespread national promotional effort for the league , and the general preference to avoid competing with the NFL in major markets hurt the league 's efforts to reach out to major media platforms . The July to November CFL season , designed to ensure the playoffs finish before Canada 's harsh winters set in , forced the American teams to play the first half of the season in oppressive heat and the second half in competition with high school , college football , and the NFL .

Tension had also arisen between the American owners and the Canadian teams . As early as the 1994 Grey Cup , the American owners , led by Speros in Baltimore , were calling for numerous changes to accommodate the American teams and their potential fans . The American owners proposed that the end zones to be reduced 15 yards in length , that the Grey Cup be played earlier in the year , that player quotas be removed for all teams , and that a name change be considered . By 1995 , Mad Dogs coach Pepper Rodgers was openly disparaging Canadian rules and even Canadian teams . Officials of the new American teams found that the Canadian clubs were hesitant to accommodate the new American audience . The Canadian owners refused to make any major changes to the rules , the schedule , or the name of the league ; the only accommodation for American teams was to allow smaller field sizes in American stadiums that could not fit a regulation CFL field .

Debates over rules and schedules might have been solvable had the league achieved economic stability but losses amongst American teams were drastic and widespread . In 1995 alone , Fred Anderson estimated that the U.S. teams had collectively lost more than US \$ 20 million . The Baltimore Sun provides a similar estimate of US \$ 21 million . The \$ 10 million estimated loss in Birmingham was the most substantial , followed by US \$ 4 to \$ 6 million estimated for Anderson 's Texans . Memphis and Shreveport losses were estimated at about US \$ 3 million apiece . The

Baltimore losses were comparatively modest at US \$ 1 to \$ 1 @. @ 5 million , but stung the league given the prestige of the franchise .

Canadian teams were facing their own troubles , particularly with attendance . The eight Canadian teams were down to an average of 22 @, @ 740 in 1994 , a drop of 3 @, @ 000 from the previous year . It marked the beginning of an historic trough in Canadian CFL attendance that would last for most of the 1990s . A massive season ticket drive was undertaken prior to 1995 . Smith told the Rough Riders and Tiger @-@ Cats that unless they sold more tickets , they would be forced to either fold or move . In Calgary , Ryckman suggested he 'd move to the United States unless fans stepped up with 16 @, @ 000 season tickets . While season ticket goals were met , the overall increase in attendance was modest in 1995 to 24 @, @ 406 and would be wiped out the next year .

= = = = End game = = = =

With these troubles fresh , it was actually a move from the NFL that precipitated the end of the expansion experiment . On November 6 , 1995 ? the week of the South Division Final ? the NFL 's Cleveland Browns announced they were moving to Baltimore for the following season . A day after the game , the American owners called Smith and requested a meeting in Toronto ; in Smith 's words they told him , " we 'll pay our bills but we 're done . "

With the Browns ' announcement , local support for the Stallions dried up almost overnight . Speros quickly realized that as successful as the Stallions had been , they could not even begin to compete with an NFL team ; years later , he said that the Stallions would have effectively been " minor league " had they stayed in Baltimore . He began talks with Richmond , Norfolk , the Lehigh Valley , and , most seriously , Houston , which was about to lose the NFL Oilers . At one point , Speros was prepared to move to Houston and play in the Astrodome . He also intended to take on then @-@ Houston Astros owner Drayton McLane as a minority partner . Williams had decided to get out even before Baltimore 's fate was announced ; a day after being eliminated from the playoffs (and a day before the Browns announced they were leaving Cleveland) , he announced that the Barracudas would not be playing in Birmingham in 1996 , if they returned at all . Earlier , he had stated that he was not willing to play another season in Birmingham unless the league moved to a spring schedule ; he felt it would be folly to risk another season going head @-@ to @-@ head with Alabama and Auburn .

The end came swiftly in the months after the Grey Cup . By the time of a December 1 CFL Board of Governors meeting , the Mad Dogs had already folded and the Barracudas were on the brink . The Pirates held out a little longer and flirted with a relocation to Norfolk , but local officials broke off talks after they learned that Glieberman was still facing legal disputes in Shreveport . The Barracudas resurfaced in the news in January 1996 when Williams sold them for \$ 750 @, @ 000 to a group that planned to move them to Shreveport as a replacement for the Pirates . However , that deal was contingent upon the league approving the sale and relocation , which never happened .

Smith had given the American teams until the end of January 1996 to decide whether they would return for the 1996 season . By then , sources were stating that four of the five American teams had " either folded , have no stadiums to play in or will not be permitted to be part of the CFL in 1996 " . Only the Stallions appeared to be able to take the field in some form for the 1996 season . Of the American owners , Anderson was the most amenable to retaining an American @-@ based team in 1996 . While he initially stated that the league needed at least three other American teams for the Texans to be viable , he was willing to bring the Texans back for 1996 if the Stallions moved to Houston , ensuring two American teams . He estimated that if there was even one other American team in the league , he could withstand annual losses of US \$ 2 million indefinitely . However , that scenario looked less and less likely , as Speros ? under prodding from Smith ? had begun serious discussions with officials in Montreal .

Against this backdrop , a second round of league meetings was held on February 2 , where the Texans , Barracudas , Mad Dogs and Pirates were formally shuttered . Speros requested permission to move to Montreal , which was granted . He subsequently reconstituted his organisation as the third incarnation of the Alouettes . With these moves the CFL 's American

expansion was brought to a close .

= = = Aftermath = = =

The entire league was once again based in Canada for the 1996 CFL season , with Larry Smith describing the move as a " retrenchment " . This did not stem the troubles the teams were facing . With no expansion fee revenue to buoy them , eight of the nine Canadian teams would lose money in 1996 . The Rough Riders disbanded at the end of the season and the Stampeders declared bankruptcy after Ryckman was fined \$ 250 @, @ 000 for stock manipulation by the Alberta Securities Commission . After the indictment of McNall , Ryckman was the second major architect of expansion to run afoul of the law .

Other legal troubles were left over in wake of the expansion collapse . Louisiana courts eventually ordered the Gliebertmans to repay Shreveport US \$ 1 million with interest ; the dispute centered over whether the city had agreed to share losses or simply lent money to the ownership group . Art Williams , enraged after discovering some American owners had received discounts and extended payment periods on their franchise fees , threatened litigation and at first refused to honour the balance of Matt Dunigan 's sizable contract before the matter was dragged through court .

The expansion fees themselves were a significant legacy of the expansion effort . Smith claims US \$ 14 to \$ 15 million was brought in and that it saved the league . A more modest assessment suggests expansion saved the Stampeders and Tiger @-@ Cats at the very least ? both teams were undeniably in distress during the era ? and that the other Canadian teams bought time .

The post @-@ expansion financial crisis would eventually elicit a response from the NFL . By the end of 1996 , speculation was rampant that if the NFL placed a franchise in Toronto , it would mean the end of the CFL . Instead , in exchange for a new player agreement between the leagues , the NFL provided the CFL franchises with marketing assistance and a \$ 3 million loan in 1997 .

In 1999 , World Wrestling Federation chairman Vince McMahon was offered the chance to buy the Argonauts , and countered with a proposal to buy the entire league and " have it migrate south " , which the owners refused . McMahon would instead partner with NBC to create the XFL , which would place teams in Birmingham , Las Vegas , and Memphis at the same stadiums as their respective CFL franchises previously played . The XFL failed after one year .

The CFL re @-@ gained relative stability in the 2000s , mostly thanks to enforcement of a salary cap , stricter standards of ownership , and increasingly lucrative television contracts negotiated with Canadian networks . The league has remained solely focused on its Canadian operations , with expansion efforts focused on returning a stable team to Ottawa (the Renegades in 2002 and the Redblacks in 2014) and one @-@ off games such as Touchdown Atlantic and Northern Kickoff in more distant Canadian markets . Further U.S. expansion has been occasionally proposed but has not been formally explored ; the spectre of American CFL games has mainly been used as a device for satire and April Fool 's Day jokes .

The establishment of the Montreal Alouettes remains as the major legacy of the American experiment . After the 1996 team faced a lukewarm reception , Speros would sell the Alouettes to Robert Wetenhall , with Smith resigning as commissioner to become President of the team . Wetenhall 's patient ownership , and a move to a smaller outdoor stadium called Percival Molson Memorial Stadium , slowly returned the team to stability and steered it to three Grey Cups . The Stallions ' general manager , Jim Popp , followed the team to Montreal . Longtime Alouettes starting quarterback Anthony Calvillo was the last remaining active player that played for an American CFL team (Las Vegas) upon his retirement after the 2013 season .

= = = List of American CFL teams = = =

= = = Teams that played = = =

===== Proposed teams that did not play =====

== Post @-@ expansion American media ==

For five years after the expansion era contract with ESPN ended in 1997 , the CFL was absent on American television . At the end of 2001 the league began a relationship with America One that would last until 2009 . Coverage was relatively generous with 43 games , including the playoffs , covered in the last year . A more modest deal of 14 games was negotiated with the NFL Network in 2010 , which lasted two years . The 2012 season began without a contract and the league resorted to internet broadcasts on ESPN3 until NBC Sports Network agreed to a 14 @-@ game regular season package of its own ; unlike the NFL network , NBC opted to broadcast games during the NFL preseason as well as cover the playoffs and Grey Cup . Both the NBC and ESPN deals were renewed in 2013 with a slight scaling back of playoff coverage and ESPN2 also picking up a handful of games in the summer months . American broadcasts have been simulcasts of game coverage from Canadian networks .