

Bridesmaid Brady finally gets his chance

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CanWest News Service

Sunday, November 11, 2007

WINNIPEG -- When he was a college student at Cal State Northridge, Marcus Brady was named the Big Sky Conference's newcomer of the year as a freshman. He started 43 consecutive games for the Matadors, and was the school's all-time leader in completions, attempts, yards and touchdowns.

In 2002, about to embark on a pro career, USA Today suggested he likely was to become a Sunday starter.

There's only one professional football league that plays every Sunday, and it isn't the Canadian Football League. And yet today, six years later, Brady will start a playoff game for the first time in his career, as the Alouettes attempt to upset the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in the East Division semifinal.

Six years, and Brady already is on his third team. Always a bridesmaid but never the bride, he has backed up Damon Allen in Toronto, Danny McManus in Hamilton and Anthony Calvillo in Montreal. Brady has displayed flashes of brilliance but, more often than not, has been just another guy.

All that could change today.

"It could be a defining moment. We'll see where it goes," said Brady, 28. "I'm not going to get ahead of myself, but it would be a big win. The entire playoffs are a defining moment."

He seemed to have the entire package coming out of school. He was a pocket passer in college, but scrambling came naturally to him. He could throw deep and brought a strong leadership presence. In short, tremendous potential. Green Bay saw it, and invited him to mini-camp in 2002. But he didn't stick.

The Bombers put him on their negotiation list, only to trade him to the Argonauts for a pair of second-round draft choices. Winnipeg general manager Brendan Taman said he didn't have a roster position for Brady. But Brady said it was his agent who forced a trade to either Toronto or Vancouver - the only two Canadian cities the San Diego native had heard of.

In 2003, he came off the bench for an injured Allen in the division final, against Montreal, completing 19 of 32 passes for 276 yards and three touchdowns in a 30-26 loss. A Toronto newspaper columnist, not long after, wrote the Argos should sign Brady to a new contract and name him their starter. Instead, he was traded to



CREDIT: THE GAZETTE/John Mahoney
Montreal Alouettes quarterback Jason Maas throws a pass during second half of CFL game against the Edmonton Eskimos in Montreal September 23, 2007. Maas came into the game in the second half in relief of Marcus Brady.

Hamilton next season.

It seemed like a good deal. Brady would eventually replace McManus, everyone thought. But Brady started only three games in 2005, and could neither win or get his team to the end zone with great regularity. He was released and signed with the Als, where he has spent the better part of two seasons watching Calvillo.

"I've learned a lot and feel like I've got a hold of this game," Brady said. "Some quarterbacks had success right away. They were forced into opportunities, because of injuries. I didn't have that. I'm not disappointed. To me, it is what it is. That's life, and you can't control some things.

"I always felt like my time would come. I definitely don't feel like this is my last stop in the playoffs or big games."

Brady was 1-2 as the Als' starter earlier this season, while Calvillo recovered from a torn rotator cuff, and has split a pair of games after the veteran took a leave of absence to be with his wife, suffering from cancer. It's Brady's turn now; the Als his team to lead. How ironical that it would come in his sixth season. Calvillo, too, toiled for six seasons before his career finally blossomed.

Although it must be tough on Brady replacing a quarterback who has defined so much of what comprises the Als, he appeared calm and relaxed yesterday, not stressed in the least. Brady exudes confidence. And now, he must attempt to get his teammates to follow.

"I'm excited to play with Marcus. I feel very confident with Marcus Brady," veteran slotback Ben Cahoon said. "Anthony has a proven track record, which speaks volumes. But I'm excited by the pressure (Brady) puts on defences. The defence has to worry about so many other factors, worry about his running ability and stretching the field vertically. It'll make us harder to defend against us."

Montreal Gazette

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