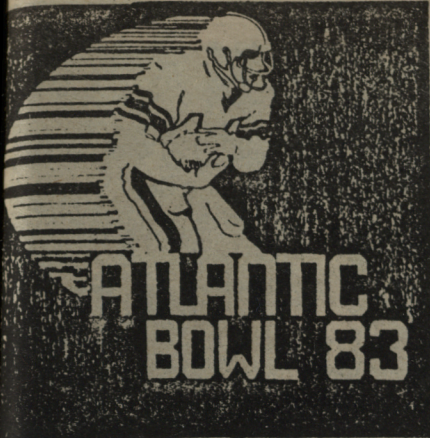


## SPORTS

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Conference, for instance, football teams regularly travel between contests by air, and costs escalate when, like last year, the Western Conference champions must travel to the east coast for the semi-final contest. The chief implication of this decision for the Atlantic region is the uprooting of the region's only major football contest, an event that attracts spectators from well beyond the arena of the particular schools competing.

In response to the CIAU action, the Atlantic Universities Athletic Association (AUAA), which represented the AUFC at the Edmonton meetings, voted to withdraw from the CIAU playoff structure for the 1983 season. Although the possibility of such an action had been considered at the annual meeting of the AUAA in May, the move came as a shock to many people associated with university athletics in the Maritimes, chief among them being the coaches of the four teams that comprise the AUFC. Only one of the four men knew of the plans to boycott the playoffs, and even he was led to believe the AUAA would retain sole possession of the Atlantic Bowl.

Questions arose immediately following the AUAA withdrawal, focussing on the present and future impact of the action on players in the AUFC. Players and coaches wondered if the one-year loss of eligibility that is imposed when a player transfers to another university would be waived in the event that Atlantic athletes might wish to transfer to schools in other conferences in order to have the chance to compete for the national championship. Coaches wondered what effect a possible migration of their star players would have on future player recruitment. Even a slight disadvantage to recruitment programmes in the Atlantic region could spell death for the AUFC, which has watched three of its teams fold in recent years. In addition, the AUFC learned that its coaches, players, and teams would be omitted from national rankings made weekly by the CIAU, eliminating any chance that

players in the conference would share in All Canadian honours, or than one of the regions coaches might be considered for Coach of the Year awards.

The CIAU, meanwhile, scheduled its post-season playoffs without including the Atlantic teams. This effectively eliminated any chance that the AUFC might rejoin the league before the end of the season, for such a move would require a massive rescheduling that would prove problematic for the other conferences, in particular the Western Conference, which was awarded an automatic berth in the championship final, held at Varsity Stadium in Toronto late in November.

Throughout the Atlantic conference, players and coaches organized to attempt a reinstatement of the AUFC into the playoff structure, but were denied readmittance. The 42 members of the Axemen squad at Acadia University, in a joint statement, threatened both the AUAA and the CIAU with legal action if they could not compete for the national championship.

In the House of Commons, deputy minister of Fitness and Amateur Sport, Peter Leseaux, said during question period that his department is urging the CIAU to settle the growing controversy. The next day, the CIAU agreed to consider the AUAA request for readmission, and announced that the AUFC would henceforth be included in the national rankings.

Meanwhile, university football fans across the region are waiting to know the fate of the Atlantic Bowl. The game, they argue, has been a tradition since 1959. It pays for itself. It regularly attracts a median of about 8000 spectators. Atlantic teams have performed well in the contest, winning 10 of the 22 games thus far. And it is the only major football contest that is played east of Olympic Stadium. It is, in short, a tradition.

That argument falls silently of the ears of national athletics organizers. The elements they consider when staging such a contest are economic, not sentimental. There are media rights to negotiate,

programmes and souvenirs to vend, spectators to accommodate.

And through all the discussion, from the league officials to the fan in the seat, little mention is made of the individual players, and of their concerns. It is their tradition, too.

This is not meant to suggest that the CIAU is different to football tradition. But it is to say that the organization, by mere fact of its lack of familiarity with the Atlantic context, has to date failed to acknowledge that what may be construed as a media event in Upper Canada is a community event in the Atlantic region. And the Atlantic people, though not predisposed to any dislike or distrust of the individuals who comprise the CIAU, have endured through much of this century a constant erosion of the elements and extensions of community, and this erosion remains for the region an important and volatile issue.

Whereas in Ontario, university football is viewed as an early glimpse of future professional stars, it is in the Atlantic region a final performance before the athletes depart for professional careers. When Atlantic Canadian football fans approach the loss of the Atlantic Bowl with talk of tradition, the real meaning of that notion is, sadly, missed. League officials and mediafolk hear only the ageless chant of Maritime traditionalists, as if that tradition were the primary concern of football fans in the region. What, in fact, the region's fans are saying is that they want to watch football, and they want to watch it live. There is, admittedly, nonextensive national media coverage and no offshooting megabucks generated. There is simply a community of football fans who wish to continue viewing their game. And the only argument they can mount against the power of mediabucks is tradition. For tradition is to community what money is to media: it is that element which comes closest to the heart and the soul.

By Paul A. Shields

Halifax, N.S.

"Keep the tradition home" is another way of saying "Keep a home for tradition to grow into."

The history of the ongoing CIAU/AUAA controversy over the fate of the Atlantic Bowl (and ultimately, of university football in Atlantic Canada) illustrates the way in which communications between regions fails in contemporary Canada. It is an illustration worth exploring, for it demonstrates how the implications of a particular debate come to supercede in importance the cogent issues of that debate. However much the implications of a controversy may add intensity to the debate, they nevertheless undermine the well-intentioned spirit of trust upon which any communication must be founded. This is especially so in regional debates, for although the specific issues may intersect the interests of the regions represented, the meaning of those issues varies dramatically with place and community.

The present controversy began in Edmonton last June at the annual meeting of the Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union (CIAU) when the organization voted to institute a rotating home advantage in the two semifinal series that precede the Vanier Cup championship game. Traditionally situated in Halifax, the Atlantic Bowl is an automatic home advantage for the Atlantic Universities Football Conference (AUFC) champions. The CIAU decided to rotate the game in order to share the home advantage with the league's other three conferences. This decision touched off controversy over conflicting regional implications of such a rotation. In the Western