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CFL RARITY: A STAR CANADIAN QB

About as rare as a Bigfoot sighting or a Justin Trudeau Fan Club in central Alberta is a starting quarterback in the Canadian Football League who is a born-and-bred Canadian.

But Nathan Rourke of the B.C. Lions is not only defying the odds, but he's in the early season running for first-team all-star at the QB position, perhaps the CFL's Most Outstanding Player and — well, Lions fans can dream, can't they — perhaps the winning Grey Cup quarterback.

Whoa, let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. After starting the 2022 season with three straight victories and some gaudy statistics, Rourke and the Lions were brought back to earth somewhat by suffering a 43-22 loss to the two-time Grey Cup champion Winnipeg Blue Bombers. The Bombers showed that the road to the Grey Cup still runs through the intersection of Portage and Main, but despite the loss to the Bombers, Rourke remains the feel-good story of the 2022 season.

Born in Victoria and developed in Canadian minor football and then three years at Ohio University, where he passed for 7,475 yards and 70 touchdowns, Rourke was drafted 15th overall by the Lions in 2020. It hasn't taken him long to assert himself and show CFL fans that a QB in the three-down game doesn't necessarily have to be from an American football factory.

The gold standard for Canadian quarterbacks in the CFL is Russ Jackson, who starred for Ottawa Rough Riders in the 1960s, winning three Grey Cups along the way. No Canadian QB has come close to Jackson's level of excellence since, but Rourke is showing signs of doing just that. After throwing 82 passes in a part-time role in 2021, Rourke roared out of the gate this year with three straight wins (88 of 105 passing, nine TD passes and only two interceptions). He is also fleet afoot, running for 180 yards in those three wins.

"He seems to really have a knack for throwing the ball and getting rid of it in time — all the good things that you have to be able to do in terms of playing quarterback and have a good passing game," Jackson, now 85, told 3DownNation.

"I think he's showing all those things ... you don't become a top CFL quarterback in two games. I'm looking forward to the future."

In Edmonton, meanwhile, another Canadian QB is making a name for himself. Tre Ford, who played his college ball in Canada and won the Hec Crighton award as the best Canadian college player, won the starting job with the Elks after being drafted eighth in the 2022 draft. An early-season injury has slowed him down.

Overall, having two Canadian quarterbacks starting as regulars in the CFL is not only a great indicator of development of the game north of the 49th parallel, but on the rarity scale, it rivals Bigfoot showing up at a Justin Trudeau rally in Red Deer.

- **Mike Bianchi** of the Orlando Sentinel, on the LIV kerfuffle: "Why do we expect American golfers to have more ethics and morals than American corporations, American sports leagues and the American government — all of which do business with nefarious nations?"
- **Phil Mushnick** of the New York Post: "Pro tennis is now as loaded with as many insufferable creeps — men and women — as the rest of the modern sports junk pile. Rooting interests are now based on the lesser of two weasels. If **Nick Kyrgios** were hitting a ball against a wall, I'd root for the wall."
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: "Olympic legend **Carl Lewis** has been named the University of Houston's head track coach. Those practices will be interesting. 'Guys, run really fast and jump really well like I did. Now if you need me, I'll be in my office.'"
- Headline at fark.com: "**Sean Payton** is on the **Tom Brady** 'retirement' plan; reportedly kicking the tires on the Chargers, Dolphins and, I hope you're sitting down, the Cowboys."
- Another one from fark.com: "The Royals finally lead MLB in a statistic — number of players barred from entry into Canada."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "New Winnipeg Jets coach, **Rick Bowness**, has vowed to get the Jets back in the playoffs this spring. Oh, and Washington Capitals coach **Peter Laviolette** says **Alex Ovechkin** is going to start back-checking."
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Updated USC motto: Student Body Left ... for the Big Ten."
- Comedy writer **Paul Lander**, on Tiger Woods' tearful goodbye after missing the cut at the Open: Championship: "Please, please, please, let someone else drive him off into the sunset."
- Seattle Mariners, via Twitter, after **Ty France**'s two-run single completed a comeback from a 5-1 deficit and give Seattle a 6-5 win, its 11th straight: "France comes up clutch on Bastille Day."

- **Dan Martin** of the New York Post, on baseball's runaway leader: "The Yankees are starting to look like Secretariat in the Belmont Stakes."

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