

# Where Are They Now • Tom Burgess '86

By Jim Leach

Tom Burgess's storybook 1985 season as Colgate's quarterback presaged a 10-year career and a Grey Cup MVP in the Canadian Football League. Yet one of his top football memories is of a two-point loss to Peach-Bowl-bound Army – 45-43 – before 40,623 fans at West Point's Michie Stadium.

"I've had wonderful games since, but I can't say there are a lot of football memories that top it," said Burgess. "In a self-analytical way I think, 'Why would you feel that way, Tom? You lost.' It was such a feeling of David and Goliath. We were in such dire straits at half-time, to pick ourselves up by our bootstraps and get back into that game. Despite the fact that we didn't win, the way we played defined what Colgate meant to me."

Colgate was 5-1 on the season going into the Army contest. Fred Dunlap was in his tenth Colgate season, and Burgess was finally starting at quarterback after playing behind Steve Calabria '85 for three years. Army was a "stretch" game against a Division I-A opponent that was leading the nation in offense.

With Army ahead 31-3 late in the second quarter, Burgess ignited a comeback, throwing for four touchdowns and running for another. As Colgate's defense held firm and forced turnovers, including two fourth-quarter fumble recoveries by Sheldon Spicer, Burgess's offense scored on every possession in the second half. Army denied Colgate's two-point conversion attempts after the Raiders' last two touchdowns, and that was the difference in the final score. "It was a transitional game," said Burgess. "It made us realize, 'Holy cow, we have something special here.'"

Something special, indeed, beginning with Burgess and his co-captain Brian Hecht (each the youngest in families with 10 children). Two other members of that team went on to play in the NFL – running back Kenny Gamble and linebacker Greg Manusky. Two-time All-America Tom Stenglein '86 would finish the season as Colgate's all-time leading receiver (he's now #4). But it was the agile Burgess running the trap option under Dunlap's tutelage, who set the tone in the 7-3-1 campaign.

"Coach Dunlap is one of my favorite personalities in life," said Burgess. "I've never had a better coach, both for his football knowledge and the way he handled the players." High praise

from an exceptional talent who spent an admittedly frustrating three years as an understudy to another great quarterback. "I always understood my predicament and never begrudged it," said Burgess. "But it certainly made the season that I did play that much more memorable."

Burgess broke 14 records on his way to being named Andy Kerr Offensive Player of the Year. He connected with Tim Walsh on the longest pass play in Colgate history, an 86-yard touchdown in a 21-20 win over Cornell (typical of Burgess, he noted "most of it was on the ground"). He passed for more than 200 yards in seven games that season, and set records for total yards passing with 2,565 (still fourth best all-time) and total offense with 2,927 (now fifth best). He passed for 346 yards in his last collegiate game, a 48-37 victory over Boston University. He was twice named ECAC Offensive Player of the Week (against Army and BU). For all that output he's quick to share credit with his offensive line: Scott Lesperance, Alan Swan, Erik Rosenmeier, John Grabarits, Don Franklin and Scott Whyatt.

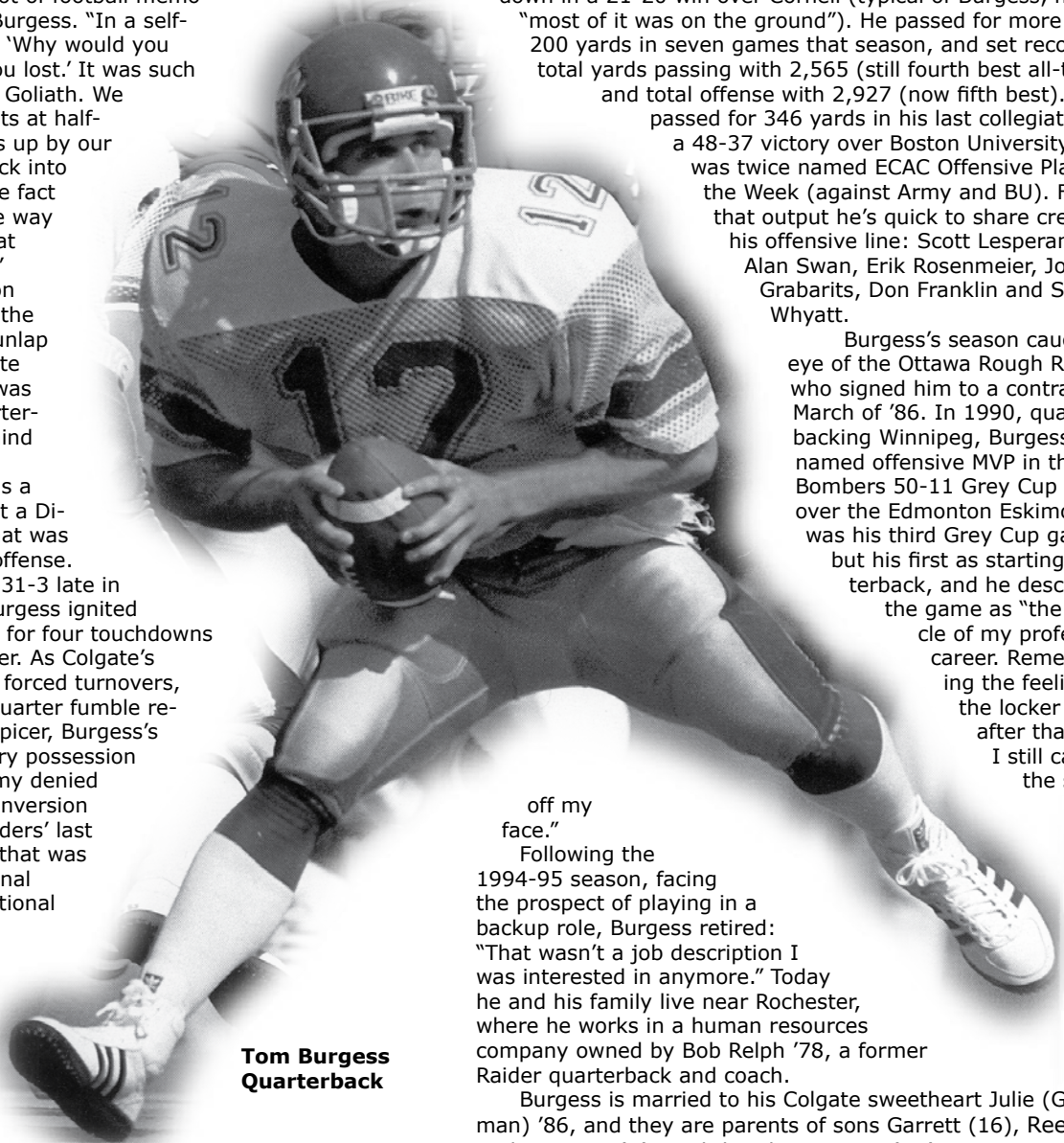
Burgess's season caught the eye of the Ottawa Rough Riders, who signed him to a contract in March of '86. In 1990, quarterbacking Winnipeg, Burgess was named offensive MVP in the Blue Bombers 50-11 Grey Cup win over the Edmonton Eskimos. It was his third Grey Cup game, but his first as starting quarterback, and he describes the game as "the pinnacle of my professional career. Remembering the feeling in the locker room after that game, I still can't get the smile

off my face."

Following the 1994-95 season, facing the prospect of playing in a backup role, Burgess retired: "That wasn't a job description I was interested in anymore." Today he and his family live near Rochester, where he works in a human resources company owned by Bob Relph '78, a former Raider quarterback and coach.

Burgess is married to his Colgate sweetheart Julie (Gottesman) '86, and they are parents of sons Garrett (16), Reece (7), and Emmett (3), and daughter Devin (12).

He's joined by '85 teammates Gamble, Manusky and Stenglein in Colgate's Athletic Hall of Honor.



**Tom Burgess  
Quarterback**