

History of the Yates Cup

Much has changed in Canadian football since the Yates Cup was first awarded in 1898. The newly formed and grandly styled Canadian Intercollegiate Rugby Football Union (CIRFU), consisting of exactly three schools (McGill, Queen's and Toronto) had been established the previous winter as the first interuniversity league in Canada. The game played was still largely indistinguishable from rugby with 15 men a side. Neither a system of downs nor the forward pass had yet appeared.

The Yates Cup marked its 100th season of competition in 2007. The oldest Canadian intercollegiate trophy in any sport, the Yates Cup is North America's oldest football trophy still being awarded, pre-dating the Grey Cup and the Michigan-Minnesota "Little Brown Jug" by 11 years.

The trophy was presented by Dr. Henry Brydges Yates, a McGill medical graduate in 1893 who had played football while in school. He was a lecturer in bacteriology at McGill from 1893 to 1914, and later served as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Canadian Army Medical Corps during World War One. He was the second in command of the No. 3 Canadian General Hospital (McGill) in Bologna, Italy. While overseas, Dr. Yates fell ill with bronchitis, which claimed his life in 1915.

As originally established, the three founding members played home-and-home series amongst each other, and the top team from that competition was awarded the Yates Cup. A post-season playoff was only held if there was a tie for first place, or the second-place team had beaten the leader in a conference game. This arrangement continued when the league expanded to four teams with the inclusion of Ottawa (1905-1912), RMC (1913) and finally Western (1929 onward). The league expanded to six teams in 1968 with the admission of McMaster and Waterloo, and for three seasons the regular season alone determined the champion. As such, there were just 27 Yates Cup championship games before 1971, and a total of 70 to date.

There have been a few interruptions and anomalies in the awarding of the Yates Cup over the years. Intercollegiate play was suspended during the two World Wars, meaning the cup remained unawarded in the years 1915-1918 and 1940-1944. The winding-down of hostilities in 1945 permitted a brief four-game schedule to be played that fall, but no official champion was declared because of the truncated season. In 1964, McMaster used an

obscure technicality in the league by-laws to challenge the league-champion Queen's Golden Gaels to a single-game challenge for possession of the Yates Cup, a display of bravado that resulted in a 63-6 walloping for the Marauders.

In 1971 the establishment of the Ontario Universities Athletic Association saw the football league double in size, resulting in the need for a playoff structure to determine a league champion. Since that time, the Yates Cup has been awarded to the winner of the playoff series. Between 1974 and 1978, the cup was awarded jointly to the champions of the east and west divisions, and in 1979 the Yates Cup final game between east and west champions also served as a Vanier Cup semifinal.

The Western Mustangs can claim a number of Yates Cup superlatives, winning the trophy 29 times, and have hosted the championship game on 22 occasions.

After more than a century, Dr. Yates simple but dignified silver cup now sits commandingly atop a substantial plinth of wooden tiers, proudly displaying the enamelled shields of past champions. Care-worn and a bit unwieldy, the trophy remains the pinnacle achievement of team effort in Ontario university football while embodying the traditions of Canada's oldest surviving football league.

(Source: Ian Speers)

Past Champions below

Past Champions

| | | | | | |
|------|-----------------|---------|----------------|---------|---------|
| 2011 | McMaster | 1976 | Western/Ottawa | 1936 | Toronto |
| 2010 | Western | 1975 | Ottawa/Windsor | 1935 | Queen's |
| 2009 | Queen's | 1974 | Western | 1934 | Queen's |
| 2008 | Western | 1973 | Laurier | 1933 | Toronto |
| 2007 | Western | 1972 | Lutheran | 1932 | Toronto |
| 2006 | Ottawa | 1971 | Western | 1931 | Western |
| 2005 | Laurier | 1970 | Queen's | 1930 | Queen's |
| 2004 | Laurier | 1969 | McGill | 1929 | Queen's |
| 2003 | McMaster | 1968 | Queen's | 1928 | McGill |
| 2002 | McMaster | 1967 | Toronto | 1927 | Queen's |
| 2001 | McMaster | 1966 | Queen's | 1926 | Toronto |
| 2000 | McMaster | 1965 | Toronto | 1925 | Queen's |
| 1999 | Waterloo | 1964 | Queen's | 1924 | Queen's |
| 1998 | Western | 1963 | Queen's | 1923 | Queen's |
| 1997 | Waterloo | 1962 | McGill | 1922 | Queen's |
| 1996 | Guelph | 1961 | Queen's | 1921 | Toronto |
| 1995 | Western | 1960 | McGill | 1920 | Toronto |
| 1994 | Western | 1959 | Western | 1919 | McGill |
| 1993 | Toronto | 1958 | Toronto | 1915-18 | War |
| 1992 | Guelph | 1957 | Western | 1914 | Toronto |
| 1991 | Laurier | 1956 | Queen's | 1913 | McGill |
| 1990 | Western | 1955 | Queen's | 1912 | McGill |
| 1989 | Western | 1954 | Toronto | 1911 | Toronto |
| 1988 | Western | 1953 | Western | 1910 | Toronto |
| 1987 | Laurier | 1952 | Western | 1909 | Toronto |
| 1986 | Western | 1951 | Toronto | 1908 | Toronto |
| 1985 | Western | 1950 | Western | 1907 | Ottawa |
| 1984 | Guelph | 1949 | Western | 1906 | McGill |
| 1983 | Toronto | 1948 | Toronto | 1905 | Toronto |
| 1982 | Western | 1947 | Western | 1904 | Queen's |
| 1981 | Western | 1946 | Western | 1903 | Toronto |
| 1980 | Western | 1940-45 | War | 1902 | McGill |
| 1979 | Western | 1939 | Western | 1901 | Toronto |
| 1978 | Laurier/Queen's | 1938 | McGill | 1900 | Queen's |
| 1977 | Western/Queen's | 1937 | Queen's | 1899 | Toronto |
| | | | | 1898 | Toronto |