



Alouettes general manager Danny Maciocia brought the Grey Cup to his former high school, Laurier Macdonald in St-Léonard, on Wednesday and took questions from students. *DAVE SIDAWAY*

Als GM Maciocia shares advice, Grey Cup at his former high school

HERB ZURKOWSKY

As a high school student at Laurier Macdonald in 1984, Danny Maciocia wasn't particularly scholarly, doing the minimum to graduate. And as a tight end on that season's football team, stretching to reach 5-foot-8 and weighing no more than 175 pounds, he might have been worse. Maciocia wore No. 74, in honour of Alouettes great Peter Dalla Riva, his boyhood idol who played the same position, and remembers his high school team didn't win a game that year. Maciocia, now the general manager of the defending Grey Cup champion Als, returned to his St. Léonard alma mater Wednesday morning, the CFL trophy riding shotgun, and fielded questions from about 280 Secondary IV and V students in the school's auditorium. His message was succinct and simple — chase your dreams and don't let anyone attempt to dissuade you.

"Be where your feet are at," said Maciocia, 56. "Sometimes you have a tendency to look into the future but get lost with where you're at. Be committed and have some consistency to it, because there's no start without commitment. And there's no end without consistency. You can't be consistent for a week or two. "Don't chase money. If you're good at something, money will find you. Enjoy the journey we call life. We only have the opportunity to do it once. Enjoy these years because you don't have to be a grown-up now with responsibilities. You're only 15, 16 once in your life. Enjoy these great years." Even as a teenager, Maciocia believed his future was in football, intrigued by the schemes, interactions and concepts. At home each night after completing — or sometimes instead of completing — his school work, he drew up plays for the coach, none of which were ever used. But the seed was planted.

After a brief stint working for — and getting fired by — his mother in the family's insurance business, Maciocia launched his coaching career in 1994 with the junior St-Léonard Cougars. He began as the offensive co-ordinator before becoming head coach the following season. He joined the Als as a quality control coach — a volunteer position, often spent breaking down film — in 1996. His wife, Sandra, gave him two years to secure full-time employment and two years later he was hired as Montreal's running backs coach, earning only \$15, 16 once in your life. Enjoy these great years. "It probably was the equivalent of a million bucks," Maciocia said. "It didn't matter how much was on that cheque. I was getting something that gave me a sense of gratification. The two years of sacrifice were worth it. "I promised myself once I got in, I wouldn't get out. For the most part, it worked out."

Maciocia has worn many hats in his career at the CFL and university levels. A former head coach and GM with Edmonton, he won Grey Cups in 2003 and '05. After being fired in 2010, he returned to Montreal and was named the head coach at Université de Montréal in 2011, beginning a nine-year run. He won the Vanier Cup with the Carabins in 2014 and was named Als GM in January 2020. The CFL cancelled that season because of COVID before Maciocia and the organization endured two years plagued by drama at the ownership level along with a coaching change in 2022; Maciocia fired Khari Jones and became Montreal's interim head coach. While Pierre Karl Peladeau's purchase of the team 13 months ago brought stability, the Als still had a losing record in mid-September before going on an incredible eight-game winning streak, capped by their come-from-behind Cup victory

against favoured Winnipeg. Without pomp and circumstance, Maciocia has basked in the glory since, the organization feted at the Bell Centre and National Assembly. "It's easier to win the Grey Cup than to deal with it," he said. "This year was more about adversity, perseverance, family and the challenges we had to endure. That's what I'm cherishing, because the trophy has to be returned at some point. But what we experienced is going to be engraved in our memories for the rest of our days. No one can take that away." Despite his perceived difficulties at school, Maciocia is the father of three successful girls. Bianca, 24, graduated from Concordia in human relations; Juliana, 20, is studying law at the University of Ottawa; while Alessia is a Secondary IV student. He said they inherited their pursuit of education from their mother. "If I'm the smartest guy in the room, change the room," Maciocia quipped. "If I could do this, there's no reason you can't achieve this or better. I tell my kids, 'You're better off paying what it costs to have success than being stuck with the bill for regret.'" *hzurkowsky@postmedia.com X.com/HerbZurkowsky1*

PWHL's effect may increase the tempo at women's worlds

Most Canadian and American players entered tournament in midseason form

DONNA SPENCER

UTICA, N.Y. How the new Professional Women's Hockey League will change the international game is the buzz heading into the 2024 women's world hockey championships. The 10-country tournament, which opened here Wednesday, is the first world championship since the six-team PWHL began operating Jan. 1 in Canada and the United States. The rosters of defending champion U.S. and rival Canada are dominated by PWHL players with a combined 30 between them. "It's one of the first times that we've come in completely game-ready having come off a season," Canadian forward Sarah Nurse said. "We have some players who have come from NCAA, but the majority of our players have come from the PWHL and the pace of play there, the level of physicality, the level of skill that we've seen in the PWHL, I definitely feel will be felt in this tournament." Another nine PWHL players are sprinkled across other countries' lineups, including four on the Czech team. Canada's first game is Thursday against Finland. Team Canada GM Gina Kings-

bury and head coach Troy Ryan hold the same positions with PWHL Toronto. With a leg in each entity, the duo has a lens on how the new league could impact Canada's fortunes. "The level our athletes have been able to continue to train at, and now compete at, it's just remarkable," Kingsbury said. "We're seeing an athlete that is far more ready coming into camps and events and Rivalry Series, but also more tired." This league can have an incredible impact on our success at a national team level, if we are aware of the changing dynamics, and if we maximize the opportunities that this league provides us, which is a daily training environment that's much higher than we had in the last five years or in the last forever years, to be quite honest with you." After losing the first three in a seven-game Rivalry Series against the U.S., Canada scratched out a December shootout victory before winning three straight in February. Ryan believes the game-readiness the PWHL provided had a hand in Canada's comeback. "Heading into February's last leg of the Rivalry Series, I remember the first practice and I was, 'OK, this group is ready to go,'" Ryan said. "There was no getting them up to speed."



PWHL Toronto and Team Canada star Sarah Nurse says this year's women's world championship in Utica, N.Y., has a different feel, with many players also suiting up in the new league. *MARK BLINCH/GETTY IMAGES FILES* "We probably have a few older athletes that earlier in the year were not getting meaningful games and needed a little bit of grease to get the wheels going type of thing. A lot of the young athletes that the U.S. are playing ... were 10 games into their NCAA year." Canada's run of titles — 2021 and 2022 world championship gold and 2002 Olympic gold in the span of just over a year — was halted in a 6-3 loss to the U.S. in last year's world championship final in Brampton, Ont. The U.S., Canada, 2023 bronze medalist Czechia, Switzerland and Finland comprise the tournament's top five seeds in Group A. Sweden, Japan, Germany, Denmark and China are the sixth to 10th seeds in Group B. The IIHF continues to bar Russia from tournaments because of that country's invasion of Ukraine just more than two years ago. U.S. and PWHL Boston forward Hilary Knight says playing 19

ON THE TUBE

Today's live sports telecasts:
 10:30 a.m. — PGA Korn Ferry Tour Golf: Club Car Championship (first round), GOLF.
 11 a.m. — IIHF Women's World Championship Hockey: China vs. Japan, TSN4.
 1 p.m. — World Men's Curling Championship: Sweden vs. Canada, TSN1, TSN5, RDS.
 3 p.m. — IIHF Women's World Championship Hockey: Denmark vs. Germany, TSN4, Rugby Super League: Leigh Leopards vs. Wigan Warriors, SNWL.
 4 p.m. — PGA Tour Golf: Valero Texas Open (first round), GOLF.
 7 p.m. — NHL Hockey: Tampa Bay Lightning at Montreal Canadiens, TSN2, RDS; Florida Panthers at Ottawa Senators, TSN5, RDS2; Pittsburgh Penguins at Washington Capitals, SNE, SNO, SNP, IIHF Women's World Championship Hockey: Canada vs. Finland, TSN1, TSN4.
 10:30 p.m. — MLB Baseball: Chicago White Sox at Kansas City Royals, TVA Sports.
 8 p.m. — NBA Basketball: Golden State Warriors at Houston Rockets, SNI.
 10 p.m. — NBA Basketball: Denver Nuggets at Los Angeles Clippers, TSN1, TSN4.
 10:30 p.m. — NHL Hockey: L.A. Kings at San Jose Sharks, SN.
EARLY FRIDAY
 1:45 a.m. — Formula One Racing: Japanese Grand Prix (Practice 2), TSN2.