

Stu Cowan: Als lineman/author Woody Baron shows kids school is cool

Hulking Alouettes tackle helps promote EMSB's new library initiatives by reading children's book he co-authored to Grade 1 students.

STU COWAN, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/STUARTCOWAN](https://montrealgazette.com/author/stuartcowan))

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Woody Baron looked more like the coolest teacher at [Nesbitt Elementary School](https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/hanes-school-libraries-are-breaking-the-code-of-silence) (<https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/hanes-school-libraries-are-breaking-the-code-of-silence>) Friday morning than a defensive tackle with the Alouettes.

Baron arrived at a news conference to promote the English Montreal School Board's newest initiatives for library transformation — called EMSB Libraries: Your Space to Explore — wearing a tan-coloured overcoat with matching handbag, black pants and shoes, a fashionable scarf, scholarly looking designer glasses and a wild hairdo.

Baron is definitely not too cool for school, though. He was there to read a 38-page children's book titled *#JustaGobbler* that he co-authored with his uncle, James Baron, and Henry Taylor. The book was a two-year project and was published in 2018 by Virginia-based Mascot Books. Baron played university football at Virginia Tech and the main character in the book is Hokie, the Virginia Tech mascot.



Alouettes defensive-tackle Woody Baron, reads his book, *#JustaGobbler*, to kids at Nesbitt school on Jan. 24, 2020. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

“Hokie is the man,” Baron said with a big smile. “Hokie is another word for a turkey. Throughout the book, he goes through this kind of confidence struggle which makes him human, gives him these realistic characteristics. The people back in Virginia absolutely recognize the name and the logo of the school, but then I’m all the way up here in Quebec and they can still relate to him in some aspect, which is nice.”

Baron, who is 6-foot-1 and 270 pounds, chose to sit in a small chair while reading his book to a Grade 1 class so that he wouldn't look too intimidating. The children sat on the floor in front of him.

"I didn't want to be standing over them while they're sitting and they're like: 'Oh, my gosh, this is an adult and he's huge!'" Baron said. "I kind of bring it down to their level."

Baron did a fantastic job with his book reading and the children listened quietly, taking in every word. It was something special to watch and made me think Baron would make a wonderful teacher after his football career.



Alouettes defensive-tackle Woody Baron reads his book, #JustaGobbler, to kids at Nesbitt school on Jan. 24, 2020. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

"I wouldn't be opposed to some sort of teaching role," said Baron, who majored in Spanish and graduated from Virginia Tech. "I think teachers have the highest level of patience, though. It's one thing for me to come in and read a book — it takes me 20 minutes, a half-hour. They're here all day. That's got to be a different challenge in itself, but something that I would welcome if it brought itself to me. I was fortunate to have a bunch of teachers who allowed you to express yourself at a young age, but then also

productively put me on the right path — writing, for one — then just as a young man developing and the right educational path.

“That’s another wonderful thing about this project, it’s really opened avenues post-football,” the 26-year-old avid reader added. “I can’t play forever. I would love to be able to just write and publish and for that to be able to sustain me, because it’s a very fun process and I really enjoy coming to these schools. As excited as the kids are to see me, I have the most fun every time.”

Baron is heading into his third CFL season with the Alouettes and is excited for it to start with new ownership and management in place and coming off a 10-8 record and the team’s first playoff appearance since 2014.



Stu Cowan
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Alouettes defensive-tackle Woody Baron was at Nesbit Elementary School this morning to read a children’s book he co-authored titled [#JustaGobbler](#) to some Grade 1 students. It was special to watch. Column coming later.



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“Change is a great thing, especially now that we have a front office secured in the organization,” Baron said. “I think we have wonderful momentum to work on from this past season even though, subjectively, that doesn’t mean anything. But I think the team has a taste of victory and what it takes to win, and that’s what I’m most excited for.”

Baron spends most of the off-season at his home in Nashville and has yet to meet new general manager Danny Maciocia, but is thrilled to have Khari Jones back as head coach.

“Coach Jones is a players’ coach and we knew that the day that he got announced as the head man (just before the start of last season),” Baron said. “We were all so excited to see him. We knew this was a new page in the team, a necessary change for us. Just throughout the season he was that extra energy, that ignition for the team that we needed from the soul of us inside the locker room. It was nice to know that we had a coach that has been through it, somewhat of a younger guy, somebody we could relate to, rally behind, all those things.”

The message Baron wants to get across from his children’s book is the importance of confidence, something he said the Alouettes now have heading into next season.

“The roller-coaster is coming whether you want to ride it or not ... that confidence roller-coaster, you’re going to go on it,” he said. “I just want them to realize that you’re going to be OK and that you’re pretty cool at the end of it.”

Just like the guy reading the book.

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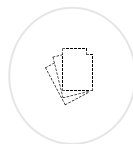
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