

sundayreader

BY JONATHAN HUNTINGTON



HOTEL ESKIMO

... Commonwealth Stadium with at-home feel

Like every year, Edmonton Eskimo training camp is a survival test.

When the players hit the field this afternoon for Day 8 of camp, there will still be 76 players fighting for 42 roster spots.

But while the fear of getting cut is still in the air and groans from back-to-back practices can still be heard, there are some intriguing differences this year because the club hasn't invaded Concordia College – longtime camp headquarters.

Obviously, construction at the Capilano campus has forced practices to Clarke Stadium. And instead of boarding players in dorm rooms at Concordia, the Eskimos have now taken over a significant portion of a nearby hotel for three weeks.

As well, instead of changing on the gym floor on campus, Eskimo veterans are now based in the team's regular – and quite luxurious – locker-room at Commonwealth Stadium.



The rookies and ex-NFLers are based across the hall in the visiting team locker-room. But the most interesting changes to camp can be found inside the bowels of Commonwealth Stadium.

Without a college cafeteria or staff to feed nearly 100 bodies a day – 76 players plus almost 10 coaches and nearly 15 support staff – a large room in the back of the food court on the west concourse of the stadium has been transformed into a dining hall catered by the Sawmill restaurant.

And for many players, it appears the food has become the No. 1 highlight of camp.

The food is so good

"This is the best training camp food that I think a lot of guys have ever had," said defensive end Tim Fleiszer, a nine-year CFL veteran with experience with four different teams.

Added offensive lineman Dan Comiskey, who is entering his 10th year in the league: "It is outstanding. But the trick is not to eat three plates per meal. Do that, you might make the team."

on the menu



What's on tomorrow's menu ...

BREAKFAST

Hot dishes: Seafood skillet, fried eggs, farmer's sausage, smoked bacon, pancakes, hash browns

Cold dishes: Fresh muffins, danishes, cinnamon buns, bagels, English muffins, toast, fruit, low-fat yogurts

SNACK BETWEEN PRACTICES

Gatorade, protein bars, bananas

LUNCH

Hot dishes: Braised red cabbage, baby red potatoes, Hungarian goulash, roasted chicken, macaroni with ham and cheese

Cold dishes: Sandwich deli bar, salad bar, soup, fresh buns and breads, fruit, low-fat yogurts

SUPPER

Hot dishes: Carved lamb, roasted potatoes, tomato stars with sautéed spinach and mushrooms, spaghetti and meatballs, grilled six-ounce sirloin steak, curried chicken

Cold dishes: Salad bar, fresh buns and breads, fruit and low-fat yogurts

Entering his 15th year with the Green and Gold, Sean Fleming is the longest-serving member of the club – and he thinks this camp might set a dubious record.

"I was saying to the guys that this might be the only Eskimo camp where everybody actually gains weight," said Fleming.

With an incredibly extensive menu that changes every day, that might become a reality. But while the back corner of the food court can pass for a dining hall, the strangest-looking changes at camp can be found in the Commonwealth Stadium media centre – of all places. Usually packed on game nights with print reporters and statisticians, the main press box is now a sleeping hall.

Roll-away beds

Twenty roll-away beds are spread across the room for players to rest after lunch or between treatment sessions with training staff.

And buried down the long narrow dark hallway amongst the radio and TV play-by-play rooms is a players' lounge. With four leather couches and another cot, players can crash in front of a 50-inch widescreen TV.

"It's great because you can rest and get ready for your meetings (late in the day)," said hulking offensive lineman Raleigh Roundtree, who parked his 339-pound body on a couch with a blanket tucked under his chin and watched a movie in the middle of the afternoon earlier this week.

With all the amenities, familiar surroundings and rave reviews after Week 1 of camp on the Commonwealth Stadium grounds, the Eskimos might never return to Concordia College – especially with the cost being about the same.

"It is all stuff we are used to – meeting rooms and facilities," continued Comiskey. "We are not moving stuff back and forth (from the school to the stadium). This is the Eskimo House and we can take care of Eskimo business."



The lunch fruit table at training camp looks yummy. Inset, players enjoy lunch at Commonwealth Stadium.

She keeps the guys running, and running ...

At first glance, Charlotte Varem-Sanders just looks like a normal fan in the Clarke Stadium bleachers watching yet another training camp practice.

But to the Eskimo brass and coaching staff, she is a key figure who has helped make this camp an efficient success so far.

In her first year on contract with the team, the nutritionist helped put together the daily food menus that have given the players the fuel to survive back-to-

back 100-minute practices in the mornings and weight-training sessions in the afternoons.

"You are looking at (the average football player needing) between 5,000-10,000 calories a day," she said. "And you are looking at 50% carbohydrates all the way up to almost 70% (of their diet)."

"Protein requirements will be higher than the average person because their muscles are working, developing and repairing."

The average active person needs about 3,000 calories a day.

As for fruits and vegetables, Varem-Sanders wants to see the players eating at least 10 servings a day, almost double the minimum recommendation for a normal person following the Canada health guide.

That explains why there are at least 11 different kinds of fruit – let alone vegetable options – on the lunch menu every day.

Varem-Sanders also visits the

players two to three times a week during meals to answer questions and offer possible suggestions.

Earlier this week, she was promoting the benefits of drinking chocolate milk after practice.

"It is an excellent recovery beverage," said the registered dietitian with Athletic Nutrition Services in Sherwood Park.

"It has got a good blend of carbohydrates and protein.

"It is also 87% water, so it helps rebuild your muscles."