

'We got our asses beat,' O'Shea says of Bombers' beatdown at hands of Stampeders

Plenty of blame to go around

TAYLOR ALLEN



5 TAKEAWAYS

CALGARY — This space is reserved to break down Winnipeg Blue Bombers games with 5 Takeaways, but their performance Thursday night in Calgary can be summed up with just one. They sucked.

Offence, defence, special teams, you name it, the Bombers didn't have it. They were steamrolled 37-16 by the Calgary Stampeders in what was the first-ever Stampede Bowl — a new marketing event designed to kick off the Calgary Stampede and get more butts in the seats at McMahon Stadium.

Bombers head coach Mike O'Shea put it poetically post-game.

"We got our asses beat. I mean, it's pretty straightforward," he said.

The Blue and Gold (3-1) can lick their wounds on their bye next week before hosting the Stamps (3-1) in a rematch on July 18.

"I won't be enjoying my bye week that much," Bombers dime back Redha Kramdi told the *Free Press*.

"I'll be thinking about (this game), watching it, trying to learn from it, and be prepared to attack the week after that."

As much as Bomberland would love to forget this one, we're gonna revisit it anyway with the latest edition of 5 Takeaways.

Collaros crumbles

Welcome to life as a professional quarterback, where one week you're the hero and the next, you're the main reason your club lost.

The glaring issue was the two pick-sixes. You're not going to win any game where you throw more touchdowns to the opposing team than your own.

Collaros was also bad outside of that, with his next biggest error coming on the second last play of the first half when he had a wide-open Keric Wheatfall in the end zone and sailed the ball over his head. A touchdown there would've cut Calgary's lead to 29-13 after two quarters and sent the Bombers into the break with at least some momentum. Instead, they settled for a field goal and failed to make a game out of it in the last 30 minutes.

Despite throwing the pigskin 20 more times than Stamps passer Vernon Adams Jr., Collaros only finished with 66 more yards in the air to give him 288 on the evening while completing



Blue Bombers quarterback Zach Collaros (right) threw two interceptions that were returned for touchdowns in Thursday night's blowout loss to the Stampeders.

34-of-48 attempts. Collaros threw a meaningless touchdown with 2:33 left, on what was a highlight-reel grab by first-year Bomber Jerreth Sterns, but it was too little too late.

He needs to be better. Simple as that.

Schoen leaves with injury

Uh oh. Not again.

With the Bombers trailing 37-9 with less than 10 minutes left, Collaros fired a high pass to star receiver Dalton Schoen who jumped up but failed to haul it in.

Immediately after, Schoen felt something was off as he laid down on the field holding his leg before walking off and staying on the sideline for the rest of the night.

Last year the two-time CFL all-star tore his ACL and only played three games.

After the final whistle, the *Free Press* asked Schoen for an injury update in the locker room.

"Yeah, not sure on anything right now. Obviously, not great when you have to leave a game, but I'm not sure of the severity," he said.

This is a team that no longer has the luxury of owning two of the very best pass catchers in the game, as Kenny Lawler is now in Hamilton. Losing Schoen would be a massive blow to a receiver room that isn't bursting with depth.

If Schoen ends up missing time, you can expect to see Dillon Mitchell — who set career highs last year in Edmonton with 58 receptions for 727 yards and four touchdowns — get called up from the practice squad. Mitchell was the Bombers' prize free-agent signing this winter but didn't make the game-day roster after a disastrous training camp and pre-season. He's a talented player, but if he still has the yips, Winnipeg could be in trouble.

One positive at the position was the emergence of second-year Canadian Kevens Clercius, who had a career

high in catches (10) and yards (78). His previous best came against Edmonton last week when he had three grabs for 53 yards.

Oliveira runs early, not often

It looked like Brady Oliveira was poised to have a monstrous stat line after a dominant first drive.

So much for that.

He had six carries on that possession for 36 yards against a Calgary defence that had been allowing enemy tailbacks to average six yards per carry.

Unfortunately for Oliveira, who was making his return after being sidelined for two games with a shoulder injury, he only saw seven more hand-offs after that as the Bombers found themselves in a 29-9 hole thanks to a brutal first half.

The good news for the Bombers is when Oliveira was involved, he looked like a reigning Most Outstanding Player who hadn't missed a beat. If he

wants to reach the heights he attained in 2024 he's going to need to have some huge games, as his start — 110 yards in five quarters of play — has him on pace to finish the season with under 1,000 yards rushing.

Forgettable defence

Defensive end James Vaughters hasn't made much of an impact in his first four games as a Blue Bomber.

The former Stampeder had a lack-lustre return to Calgary as all he could manage was two defensive tackles. The 32-year-old former NFLer — who once sacked Tom Brady — is still searching for his first sack in 2025.

Defensive co-ordinator Jordan Younger's entire unit deserves a failing grade, though. The secondary looked lost at times, the defence took several uncharacteristic penalties, and no one — not just Vaughters — was able to take Adams Jr. to the ground. Calgary running back Dedrick Mills also made them pay by gaining 93 rushing yards and a touchdown.

The group — which entered the week as the CFL's No. 1-ranked defence — was better in the second half, but at that point, the damage was already done.

"I'm gonna be honest, we played like the worst (defence)," said Kramdi.

Stamps are back

Are the Stampeders for real? It certainly looks like it.

They won 11 games in the past two years, but this isn't the same old Stamps as they revamped their defence in the offseason with 12 new starters and, most importantly, brought in Adams Jr. at quarterback after Jake Maier failed as Bo Levi Mitchell's heir apparent.

Through four contests, they're holding opponents to 20 points per game and scoring 29 points on average.

Adams Jr. had underwhelming numbers entering Thursday — zero touchdowns and three interceptions — but marched all over the Bombers in the opening half, most notably with a 43-yard touchdown pass to Clark Barnes on the first possession and then finding Jalen Philpot on a 66-yard catch and run at the start of the second quarter. Adams Jr. — who finished with 222 passing yards and two touchdowns — only tossed the ball 18 times as burning the clock out became their main objective at the end.

It's not the first time Adams Jr. has punched the Bombers in the face early in a season. Back on June 22, 2023, the veteran pivot led the B.C. Lions to an impressive 30-6 victory over the Bombers on Chancellor Matheson Road.

The Stamps could cement themselves as legit contenders if they walk into Regina next week to play the 4-0 Saskatchewan Roughriders and hand another undefeated team their first loss of the year.

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Youth divers making a big splash in familiar waters

BEN LITTLE

TWO young divers from Winnipeg returned to the national stage this weekend. This time around, they have the hometown crowd behind them.

The 2025 Speedo Junior Development National Championships are underway at Pan Am Pool. Hometown divers Mila Mortele, 12, and Gabriel Brombach, 13, were determined to make a splash in familiar waters.

This weekend marks Mortele's third national appearance. She hopes to ride the momentum of an improved showing in last year's national championships in Regina.

"Knowing that this is the final big competition of the year, I'm going to try my hardest for it," she said.

Mortele began diving age six, transitioning to competitive diving with Revolution Diving in 2019. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, she persisted through virtual diving practices at home, never losing her love for the sport.

Mortele graduates to a new age group next year; she hopes her experience will give her an edge over her competitors this weekend.

"I want to (put together) all my hard work this entire year and just try my best in this competition and do the best that I can," she said.

Brombach joined Revolution Diving at age seven. His love for the sport has propelled him to a strong start in his young career.

"I just love the water," he said. "Getting that feeling of entering the water is just really fun. I love that feeling."

In 2023, Brombach won his first gold medal at the Junior National Diving Festival in Montreal as a 10-year-old. This is his fourth time compet-

ing nationally.

Last year in Regina, Brombach narrowly missed the podium in the men's three-metre final, finishing fourth. A bad dive early in the competition threw him off.

"I felt really bad," said Brombach. "For the rest of the competition I had a really bad mood, it made my dives worse and worse."

This year, Brombach is determined to stay focused.

"Just forget about it and keep being persistent for every other dive," he said. "(Mentality) is super important."

Mortele echoed her teammate's thoughts on mentality and the importance of staying positive.

"If you're really stressing about how you're going to perform, that will also affect (your performance)," she said. "Just staying happy, interacting with your fellow competitors, but also staying focused and in the zone for your competition."

Brombach earned a silver medal Thursday in the men's C 3-m springboard, followed by seventh in the men's C 1-m event on Friday.

Mortele and Brombach were named Junior Development Divers of the Year by Revolution Diving last November. Mortele said she owes a lot to her coaches and peers.

"My teammates really motivate me so much," said Mortele. "I enjoy coming to practice every day and seeing them, because I know they're going to lift me up — make me happier. If I'm nervous, they're going to motivate me to strive for better."

"They're all my really close friends, they all feel like family to me," she added. "Seeing them every single day is amazing to me."

Mortele looks forward to diving in front of



Mila Mortele has two events remaining at the 2025 Speedo Junior Development National Championships.



Gabriel Brombach: 'When you get on that board, think about those corrections and making that dive perfect.'

her teammates during practices. Now, they'll be cheering her on as she competes for a medal.

"Before my dive, I look at them and it just makes me so much happier, and I smile," she said. "Because that's what I'm used to, and I love it."

For years, Pan Am Pool has served as home base for both divers — something Brombach said he won't take for granted.

"I know the boards, I know where to spot, I know where to come out for the dive," he said. "It feels way better than other pools."

This weekend's championships feature elite junior divers from across the country. Brombach

stressed the importance of fundamentals in a competition of this calibre.

"Just think about the dive," said Brombach. "Think about the corrections that your coach gave you, that's really important. When you get on that board, think about those corrections and making that dive perfect."

Mortele and Brombach will represent Team Manitoba later this summer at the 2025 Canada Games in St. John's, N.L.

Brombach's competition ended Friday, while Mortele competes in the women's C 3-m event today and the women's C 1-m Sunday.