



FIRST DOWN AND GOAL

VICTOR CUI TAKES ON THE BIGGEST
CHALLENGE OF HIS CAREER,
REVIVING THE CFL IN EDMONTON >

BY AVRY LEWIS-MCDOUGALL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL SWANSON

“IT’S ABOUT CREATING AND REBUILDING THESE
NEW TIES IN THE COMMUNITY THAT HAVE
BECOME SEVERED AND THERE IS NOT A ONE-
STOP SOLUTION THAT’S GOING TO FIX IT ALL.”

— VICTOR CUI

Victor Cui's story is one that took him all over the world. He's worked with some of the biggest brands in sports and co-created the largest Mixed Martial Arts promotion in Asia. And, in 2022, he returned home to Edmonton as the president and CEO of the CFL's Edmonton Elks.

"Edmonton has always been home to me. Being away gave me even more appreciation of what a special city this is," said Cui at a media event.

It's a scenario that, if you pitched it to him as a kid, he'd never have believed was possible.

"I'd have said, 'No way! You're an absolute crazy liar!'" Cui said.

Born in Edmonton, he's been a rabid Edmonton football fan since he was a kid. As with most kids, though, the plan to succeed in the sports world was not through management.

"This opportunity [to be named president of the Edmonton Elks] has come about because I love sports and I am so fortunate to have a global skill set and a passion for this organization that lined up and have given me an opportunity to do this," Cui said.

An alumnus of Archbishop O'Leary Catholic High School and the University of Alberta, Cui would go on to work with various organizations in the world of sports, including roles at the 2001 World Championships in Athletics in Edmonton, the PGA Tour's Canadian Open and ESPN Star Sports in Singapore. He would then be involved with the creation of company that would become a global sporting entity.

In 2011, as a co-founder and CEO, Cui launched ONE FC (now known as ONE Championship), a Mixed Martial Arts promotion that today is broadcast to more than 150 countries and reached a valuation worth USD \$1 billion.

In 2012, Cui was nominated as the "Leading Man Of The Year" at the World MMA Awards.

Cui's work with ONE Championship wasn't a role that saw him being involved with just one aspect of the company, as he wore many hats.

"I'm not just a sales guy that rose up the ranks to become president and all I know is sales, or I'm not just a marketing guy that rose



"EVERY DAY I DO FEEL VERY GRATEFUL THAT I HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY ... I'M JUST LOOKING FORWARD TO THE SEASON STARTING AND SEEING WHERE WE CAN GO." – VICTOR CUI

up the ranks and all I know is just marketing," Cui explains.

"I actually know how to sign and recruit athletes and how to do contracts with athletes. I know health and medical and safety because we created all of that leading stuff in Asia. I know the marketing, I know the show production, I know the PR, the social media, the operational side. All of these aspects of the business I've had my finger deep in it."

Cui's versatility brings a lot of value to various aspects of the Elks Football Club. The franchise is coming off a tough 3-11 campaign in 2021, when the Elks did not win a single home game, but also endured their lowest average attendance numbers since they moved into Commonwealth Stadium, and watched long-time fans turning away from the team. For Cui, he knows that it's not one action but many that



will restore the connections within the team to the city at various levels.

"It's about creating and rebuilding these new ties in the community that have become severed and there is not a one-stop solution that's going to fix it all. It's not like you can say, 'Oh Victor, what the alumni need to do is start attending more cultural dinners.' No, that's not the answer. The answer is not the alumni, or the players need to start making more appearances in schools. No, that's part of it, but that's one of a thousand things that we need to do to get ourselves back into the community."

Cui feels that telling the story of the franchise is one important way that it can connect with the community. On various social media platforms, the Elks are doing a 100-day countdown leading up to the home opener on June 18, showcasing legendary players and moments from the history of the franchise. The Elks are also trying to pack the stands for their June 3 preseason game. All tickets are \$15, with all proceeds going to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation.

Not only is it important to Cui to retell the legacy of the Elks' victories and big moments, but also use it as a way to give newcomers to the team and the city a way to understand the history of the club, so that they can feel a connection and understand what the team means to the community.

"It's our responsibility to do those kind of things and that's really a big part of making new fans," says Cui. "If you're a long-term season ticket holder, you'll remember the five years in a row when we won, that's already entrenched in your memory. If you're a new Canadian or you just moved to Edmonton? You have no idea what that is so you have no connection to the team, that's why we have to tell those stories."

In working to restore the team's connection to the city and usher in a new era, Cui is filled with optimism in his new role as not only the president but as a fan of the sport, and someone who wants to see the city come together again for the Green and Gold.

"I take it all in stride. Every day I do feel very grateful that I have this opportunity. I'm looking forward to it because I love football. I'm just looking forward to the season starting and seeing where we can go." ■