

BLOOD BOWL

The Death Bowl

4 teams – 1 field – 0 refs and only one Champion. Is it worth your soul?

By Brian St James

The Death Bowl is an annual event held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada each October. Attracting coaches from all over North America it is an event unique in both its nature and content. The Death Bowl is currently the only Death Bowl type tournament on the NAF circuit. It is also the only tournament to feature not only 4 rounds of standard Blood Bowl and a championship round of Death Bowl, but also a short round of Blood Bowl 7's to shake things up a little. This combined trio of Blood Bowl flavors means that the winner of the Death Bowl must not only play their way to the top through some of the best coaches in North America, they must do so through three different types of Blood Bowl. This means the winning coach is not only lucky, but has a fair amount of skill to back it up.

HISTORY

In the summer of 2002 I attended my first Blood Bowl tournament. It was the Orion Cup held in Toronto, Ontario. It was a great event and the first time I had been with so many other Blood Bowl fanatics. I was immediately hooked. I knew then I would have to run my own tournament.

In March of 2003 I was lucky enough to have the chance to travel to England and attend the Blood Bowl. I didn't go to play though, I went to referee. A lot of my friends thought I was nuts. Why was I going to travel over 5000 miles to watch other people play? I did it because I figured it was the best place to learn how to run a major event. I wasn't disappointed. You really couldn't ask for a better place to learn about running a Blood Bowl tournament. Attending the Blood Bowl is something special and I recommend it to anyone who has the opportunity. The behind the scenes insight I gained from the Blood Bowl would help a lot in my preparation for my own tournament.

So, armed with my new found interest in tournaments, the behind the scenes info from the Blood Bowl, and my own past experience as an event coordinator I set out to hold my own tournament. But what type of tournament. For those of you who remember those were the times when new tournaments were popping up all over the place. Why would people travel to Montreal, in the chill of October no less, to play Blood Bowl? I had to give them something that was unique, something that hadn't been done before. I had to give them Death Bowl.

HOW TO BUILD A TOURNAMENT

Death Bowl, for those of you who don't know, is a variant of Blood Bowl where four teams play at the same time on a specially designed field. Basically it's 2 slightly modified fields, one laid across the other to form an "X". In the variant that I use we play with 2 balls and slightly modified rules to take care of issues that come up when 4 teams and 2 balls are on the field at the same time. The big difference is that instead of having only one opponent you now have three. That is unless you make an alliance with one of the other coaches, or several other coaches. That's where the fun really begins. You never really know if another coach is friend or foe because it can change from round to round or even during the same round. It adds a third dimension of gut feeling and people skills into the mix of skill and luck. And trust me, to win a Death Bowl championship you need a whole lot of all three.

This was the foundation that I would build the tournament on. A game of carnage and brutal game play. The next thing I needed was a great trophy. All good tournaments have them and they become synonymous with the event. I needed something that was big, heavy, and equally as brutal and unforgiving as Death Bowl itself. As luck would have it there was a project I had been meaning to make for some time that I thought would be perfect. A twin headed battle axe, forged from solid steel, copper, brass, a few precious metals & leather thrown in for flavor. Weighing in at just over 20 pounds it takes a fairly strong person to wield it. This would be my tournament trophy. The winner of each years event

Brian and fellow competitors enjoy a championship game



Dan loving every minute



The high point of the whole event was the Championship Death Bowl round. As the event was being held in Montreal and there were a fair number of coaches from Toronto in attendance there was a lot of competition going on for bragging rights. As it would turn out the final round would see three Toronto coaches, Ben Tusim, Dennis Clapham & Rob Wilson and Montreal's own Steve Lalancette. Steve may be better known to some of you as "Zombie". Those of us from Montreal thought Steve was doomed. Surely the three Toronto coaches would make short work of smashing his team into the dirt. The Death Bowl though has it's own way of deciding things. That's what's makes it such an exciting event. You never know what will happen until the last die is rolled. In the end Steve would go on to win the event.

would have their name engraved directly onto the axe. Two champions so far have had the honor of lifting the axe into the air with a guttural cry of victory. An elite group of coaches that can say they won the Death bowl.

One of the hardest things to do in organizing a tournament is finding a suitable location to hold it. In fact I'm still looking. The original idea was to host the event in an old church or some place that looked run down. Somewhere that set the mood for the event. You would think that would be an easy task in a city the size of Montreal. My findings were to the contrary. Too expensive, already booked, too small, too far out of the way. In the end I settled on holding the event at a local college. It wasn't what I was hoping for but it was cheap, came with all the tables and chairs, was accessible to all the local transportation systems, and it was cheap. So with trophy in hand and location all picked out I set out to hold the first ever Death Bowl.

DEATH BOWL I

Death Bowl I was a unique experience for everyone involved. It was the first time I had run a Blood Bowl event so I was unsure of exactly what to expect. It was the first time a Blood Bowl event was held in Montreal so there were a lot of coaches there for whom this would be their first tournament experience ever. I had arranged for Andy Hall of Fanatic to be at the tournament as a special guest for the event. It was the first time Andy had been to Canada and definitely the first time anyone at the tournament had a chance to speak in person with someone who had a hand directly in the daily running of Blood Bowl. It was the first time a Death Bowl format tournament had been run and it was the first time the NAF ranking system would be tested against the Death Bowl tournament system. All in all there were a lot of things that could have gone wrong. Fortunately the event was a smashing success.

The Toronto coaches, in a shameful display of infighting that to this day they have not lived down, would be the instrument of their own destruction.

Dennis scored two touchdowns early in the first half with his Wood Elf team. This got everyone else at the table pretty nervous as they were thinking Dennis was about to run away with the game. Rob, playing Dwarfs and Ben, playing Orcs, teamed up with Zombie who was playing Norse. Over the next several turns they proceeded to pound Dennis into the dirt. A plan was hatched. The other three players would each score 2 points to tie the game up 4 ways. Then they would take the game into overtime and fight it out over the final victory point. At the time it sounded like a good plan, looking back now, maybe not so much. Steve would be the first to score 2 points. By that time it was getting late in the second half and it was looking like it might take a long long time to tie things up and then fight it out. Not wanting the game to go down in history as the longest game ever recorded, Rob decides to break the alliance and turn on Steve. Ben and Steve stayed as a team. It was too little too late though as

Brian continues work on the Death Bowl axe



Still working on that axe...



Dennis and Rob couldn't stop Steve from scoring that winning third touchdown. Steve "Zombie" Lalancette would go down in Blood Bowl infamy as having won the first ever Death Bowl.

THE LONG MONTHS BETWEEN

After Death Bowl I was over I took a little time off to be with the family. Anyone who organizes a big event knows it takes a toll on the family time. A word to the wise, a happy wife makes Blood Bowl life a whole lot easier. When I got back into the swing of things I took the time to look at how the first event went. You can't know where you want to go if you don't know where you've been. In general everything went pretty well with the first year. Everyone had a good time, all the games went smoothly, and the round of Death Bowl was a smashing success. One thing that did seem a little out of order though was the number of rounds played before getting to the Championship round. During the first year we only played 4 preliminary rounds to determine the top 4 coaches. That's not bad with a small field of coaches but as the numbers get bigger it was obvious that wasn't going to be enough. The question though was how to add another round of Blood Bowl to an already full weekend schedule. The Death Bowl round itself takes the entire second half of the second day of the tournament. Adding another round would only serve to make an already long day even longer. I needed a way to add more rounds to the tournament without making the event itself any longer. The answer was BB7's

Blood Bowl 7's, or BB7's as I'll refer to it, is a game of condensed Blood Bowl played on a smaller field with only 7 players per side instead of 11. A game can usually be finished in 90 minutes while still maintaining the full flavour of the game. This would fit perfectly into the Sunday morning schedule. A quick pick up game of BB7's to start the morning was just what was called for. During

the Death Bowl II event I ran the round of BB7's as an experimental round. That meant that it didn't count for full points. After the tournament it was put to a poll and with almost unanimous resolve it was decided that BB7's would be a full part of the Death Bowl III lineup.

The only other thing I felt was missing from the tournament was it's own custom stadium. The tournament had to be held somewhere right? Once again I happened to have a project on the back burner that I had wanted to do but never before had the excuse. I had always wanted to make a glassed pitch stadium. Something that you could see through to scenery below. I had the tempered sheet of glass sitting around for quite some time and decided that this would be the basis for my

tournament stadium. Now this is where I refer back to my previous statement that a happy wife makes Blood Bowl life a whole lot easier. Building the stadium took a lot of time. A lot more time than I thought it would. Engraving glass and setting it into a stable, transportable frame was something I had never done before. It was a process of trial and error to get things right and a matter of taking my time to get it right the first time. I only had the one sheet of glass and not much chance of getting another. I called the stadium Phantom Field and built it into the shape of the funnel of a volcano. The glass pitch is set half way down the funnel. A plasma lamp set under the glass simulates the contained eruption of the volcano. There are also speakers in the box connected to a cheering box which can be activated by a switch on either end of the board. Dice rollers and cup holders are set into the upper scenery. All in all I think it turned out pretty nice. There are still a few little details I want to add to it but the guys at Death Bowl II had a great time playing on it.

Frantic gaming



Death Bowl II group photo



DEATH BOWL II

Sooner than expected October rolled around again and it was time for Death Bowl II. The second annual event would see a number of recognizable faces return and just as many new ones testing the waters for the first time. Montreal has a vast Blood Bowl community that is virtually untapped as far as Blood Bowl tournaments go so it's not surprising to see people turn up at the Death Bowl who have never attended a tournament before. Once again the Toronto crew represented themselves at the tournament. Rob Wilson and Ben Tusim leading the group with a hunger in their eyes for revenge after the previous years defeat. Returning was also the Death Bowl I champion Steve Lalancette, he was looking to defend his title.

At the start of the event we began a new tradition for the Death Bowl. The returning of the Wooden Spoon. During the year between the first Death Bowl and the second I went out and purchase a 4 foot long wooden spoon. I varnished it and gave it to the first years last place coach, Billy Zavos. He thought it was a hoot so I let him hold on to it for a while. At the opening ceremonies he returned the Spoon to the tournament so that it could be passed on to that years last place finisher. So will go the tradition for the last place recipient of the Wooden Spoon. Every year the previous recipient will be invited to return with the spoon and pass it off to the next lucky recipient.

Tournament play on day one of the event was quite fierce. Ben Tusim took an early lead reserving him a spot at table number one for round two of the tournament. He would end up staying there for the rest of the event. Everyone else was left to fight it out for the other three spots at the championship table. One player that came from behind and took everyone by surprise was Billy Zavos. You remember him, he was the recipient of the Wooden Spoon at Death Bowl I. By the end of Day

one he was playing at Table 3. At that time he had a shot a making it into the Championship round. It was not to be though as he went on to tie in round three and a quick loss in round four sealed his fate.

Round four on Sunday morning went particularly well. This was the round scheduled for BB7's. Everyone made the appropriate adjustment to their rosters and dove right into the round like they were old hands at it. It was interesting to see the choices people made as to who to bench from their roster and who to play. It made for an interesting relaxed Sunday morning game. Just what the doctor ordered to wake up the sleepy minds of those who stayed out a little too late partying on Saturday night.

Finally the Championship round rolled around. Sitting at the championship table would be the seemingly impossible to beat Ben Tusim, Frederic Daigle, Glenn Jones, and just squeezing into the forth slot was yours truly, Brian St.James. After the soap opera of events that took place at the previous years final match this match had a lot to live up to. Speaking from first hand experience I can say that it didn't disappoint. The big surprise at this year final was the bizarre lack of alliances. This was in stark contrast to the first Death Bowl final where the entire event was about alliances. Of course it wasn't for a lack of trying on my part. I have to admit that, being a Montreal coach, I wanted to see another MTL coach win the event so I was trying my best to forge an alliance with Fred. He never took to the idea though, preferring rather to go it on his own and simply bash his way through the crowd to a TD. Fred scored first and that put everyone else under the gun. With no one willing to form alliances and Fred already with a TD under his belt it was every man for himself as the rounds clicked away. It was looking like Fred might walk away with it for a while but suddenly a slight window of opportunity opened up for Glen Jones to score a TD and tie up the game. It was the last turn of the second half. Everyone

The tournament trophies





else had gone and it was all up to Glen. Glen with his Dwarves was in a position to score but it wouldn't be easy. First he had to pick up the Ball in a tackle zone. Rolls and success. Then he had to dodge out of the tackle zone. Rolls and again a success. He moves his player towards the end zone and comes up short by one square. He has to make a go for it. It's every coaches worst nightmare. No re-rolls left, standing at the end zone, you have to roll anything but a one to score. Glen got up from the table and took a walk before he rolled the die. Remember that by this point we had been playing the same game for just over 4 hours and it was an intense 4 hours for everyone involved. Glen returned and picked up the die. Everyone in the room is watching as Glenn rolls it across the table. Roll, roll, swivel plop and the room goes crazy! Glen rolled a one and with that Frederic Daigle became the second Death Bowl Champion. Glen took the accursed die home and vowed to glue it to a base with the 1 up for all eternity. I can't wait till next year when he comes back and uses it as his turn marker.

At the closing ceremonies Fred was presented with the axe and he raised it into the air with a proud cry of victory. Billy stepped up again to hand his wooden spoon to the new recipient, Garth Elliot. Garth took it home vowing to return for Death Bowl III to pass it on to the next lucky recipient. After his display of character at the final round Glenn Jones

took home the most sporting coach trophy as well as the most casualties trophy. Everyone had a good laugh at that. He may have pounded you into the ground but he made you feel good about it. Glenn also took home the second place trophy. Ben Tusim took home third place and Rob Wilson took home the best painted award. So ended Death Bowl II. Some of us were winners some of us not so much but every person there had a fantastic time. In the end that's what it's all about.

LOOKING AHEAD

That pretty much brings us up to today and the plans I have for Death Bowl III. The highlight of this years new features will be the mega Death Bowl stadium that I'm building for the event. Built into a revolving platform it will be made entirely of cast plaster bricks. Almost 5 feet across it will used only for the

championship Death Bowl round. Construction has already begun and it's slated to be finished in late September. Also new this year will be all new Death Bowl and BB7's combination boards. One side will have a Death Bowl pitch and flipped over it will have 2 BB7's fields. These are being made of MDF particle board and will be a vast improvement over last years printed BB7's boards.

Finished for this year is the House Rulez blimp. It was supposed to fly at last years event but a technical problem at the event left it sitting on a table the whole weekend. Ok it won't actually be flying but it will hang over or around table number one.

Looking ahead to future Death Bowls it's hard to say where the event may end up. Tournaments are evolving all the time and The Death Bowl will continue to evolve along with them. The one thing that can be sure of though is that the Death Bowl will always be about having a good time over good games of Blood Bowl.

Death Bowl III will be held the 15th and 16th of October, 2005, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. For more information please visit www.house-rulez.com and check out the Tournaments section.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian St James, or, Cyberhare, as he is often known online is the webmaster of House-rulez, an invaluable Blood Bowl website. Brian lives and works in Montreal, he wants YOU to come and participate in the next Death Bowl, go to www.house-rulez.com