

NFL

Optimism becoming prevalent with Bills

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

It's no secret that as the Buffalo Bills go, so go the fans in Western New York.

When the Bills lose, the fans grumble and feel inferior. When the team wins, everything seems a little more colorful around Buffalo.

Well, this week, things are looking up. With the Bills' stunning 16-6 demolition of the Miami Dolphins Sunday and a close, 19-17 loss to the New England Patriots in Week One, fans are beginning to think this year's team isn't as bad as they had expected during the summer.

And the Bills are walking around with a little more swagger as well.

"There's a real difference in the locker room and in the building, not just on the team," said head coach Dick Jauron who was enjoying his first win with the Bills. "Everybody is in the thing together. When we win, we win together and when we lose we lose together — everybody gets a little down. There's a definite difference."

Many fans are starting to think

the Bills may not be the AFC East cellar dwellers they were picked to be by several analysts before the season began. Fans are walking around with a little more pride, especially with the New York Jets coming to Buffalo this week for the Bills' home opener.

The Jets are also 1-1 on the season and this game could mean a lot in the division standings.

While Jauron has been busy running his players through practice, even on Monday, which is generally considered an off day around the league, he said he is aware of what is going on outside the walls of Ralph Wilson Stadium.

"I haven't been outside very much," he joked after practice Monday. "It is a great feeling that our fans are as good as any fans that ever lived. We like the fact that they win and lose with us too. We're aware of that. And if it feels anything like this building feels today, then there's a good feeling in Buffalo. That's a very good thing."

And the Bills are giving the fans plenty of reasons to feel optimistic about the rest of the season. The defense is holding op-

posing offenses to under 12 points per game. The special teams is playing superbly. If the offense comes around and starts putting some more points on the board, Buffalo could make some serious noise in the league.

Who would have expected rookie safeties Donte Whitner and Ko Simpson to be as productive as they have been this year? The two have combined for 26 tackles in two games and helped keep the pass defense strong.

London Fletcher-Baker has been a monster at linebacker with 20 tackles and a fumble recovery for a touchdown. His linebacker mates Angelo Crowell and rookie Keith Ellison have also been a strength for the Bills defense. If Takeo Spikes can get healthy and return to top form, the linebacker crew will be stellar.

Punter Brian Moorman is showing everyone why he was a Pro Bowler last year. He dropped five of his six punts against Miami inside the 20-yard line and is averaging 40.8 yards per punt. And kicker Rian Lindell has been perfect in four field goal attempts and three PAT kicks.

Running back Willis McGahee



Buffalo's tandem of quarterback J.P. Losman and running back Willis McGahee will look to keep the running game going this week then the Bills host the New York Jets in the home opener.

Photo by Patrick McPartland

looks to be breaking through as the standout rusher everyone thought he could be with 161 yards in two games.

Even receiver Josh Reed is sur-

prising people, as he leads the team with seven receptions for 79 yards.

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Predictions: Bee staffers jetting to pick Buffalo over New York

The Buffalo Bills surprised many, including the fans in Miami, with their dismantling of AFC East rival Dolphins, 16-6, Sunday for their first win of the season.

Ryan Denney sparked the defense with three sacks, while London Fletcher-Baker racked up 10 tackles. Superb special teams play by Brian Moorman, who nailed five of his six punts inside the Miami 20-yard-line, and Coy Wire, who blocked a punt, gave the offense excellent field position all day.

The Bills (1-1) come back to Buffalo for the home opener this week, when they host the New York Jets (1-1) at 1 p.m. Sunday. New York is coming off a 24-17 loss to New England. Buffalo and New York are tied for second place in the AFC East, trailing New England.

• Anyone who tells you they foresaw Buffalo's thumping of the Dolphins is a liar. But I wouldn't be surprised if quite a few people decide to hop back on the Bills' bandwagon after their impressive win this past Sunday. If the defense can have another outstanding performance, and J.P. Losman can get more involved in the offense's production, I see no reason why Buffalo can't dominate its second consecutive division oppo-



nent. — Buffalo 27, NY Jets 17. Jason Nadolinski, Sports Reporter (2-0)

• Speed kills and the Bills defense has a lot of speed to go around. After exploiting the Dolphins, Chad Pennington will make a few more plays but not enough to beat the Bills. Slow starting Bills receiver Lee Evans will have his breakout week and head coach Dick Jauron's home debut will be successful. — Buffalo 24, NY Jets 13. Chris Gordon, Orchard Park Editor (2-0)

• The Bills looked strong this past weekend, bringing home their first victory of the season against the rival Miami Dolphins. J.P. Losman played smart, throwing just a few long throws to maintain the respect of the opposing team. In the home opener this week against the NY Jets, the

Bills may struggle, but will continue to play tough. — Buffalo 21, NY Jets 17. Jill Schmelzer, Lifestyles Coordinator (2-0)

• Is there anything better than a win against Miami on the road? Sure there is, a win against the Jets in the Bills' home opener. Once again, the opponent will be tempted to exploit the Bills young secondary and neglect to run the ball, while the Bills will do the exact opposite and cruise to a 2-1 record in September. — Buffalo 21, NY Jets 10. Ken Bartolotta, Lifestyles Reporter (2-0)

• Riding the momentum of a surprise win over the archrival Dolphins will give the Bills just that much more enthusiasm when they host the Jets in the home opener. Look for the rookie tandem of Donte Whitner and

Ko Simpson to make some big plays in the defensive backfield again this week. Buffalo 17, NY Jets 10. Matt Krueger, Sports Reporter (1-1)

• The Bills look like they finally

have their act together and, on paper, should beat the Jets. My heart lies with the Bills but my head says until they can consistently win, they will lose. — NY Jets 16, Buffalo 13. Patrick Nagy, Sports Reporter (1-1)

• If J.P. Losman and the Buffalo offense want to be effective, they are going to need more than 89 yards passing to do so. New York Defensive end Shaun Ellis comes to play week in and week out as does left cornerback Andre Dyson. Want to be a force on offensive and win ball games? Neutralize this two anchors of the NY Jets defense and steam roll down field. Oh, and the 12th Man needs to be loud all day. — Buffalo 24, New York Jets, 12. Nick Primerano, Ken-Ton Editor (1-1)

Boxing

Mesi wins fourth comeback fight

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

After a pair of four-round bouts against less-than-stellar opponents, Town of Tonawanda heavyweight "Baby" Joe Mesi is ready to take his comeback to the next step.

Mesi (33-0, 26 knockouts) won a unanimous decision over Jason Weiss (3-2, two knockouts) Friday in Manistee, Mich. in a four-rounder and is looking to move back up to 10-round bouts.

This was the Sweet Home High School graduate's fourth fight since beginning his comeback from a two-year suspension for brain bleeds. He won decisions over Ron Bellamy (14-5-4) and Stephane Tessier (3-9-0) and knocked out Dennis Matthews (9-28) earlier this year. The Bellamy bout was eight rounds and the Tessier fight was six rounds, but

both Matthews and Weiss were four-rounders.

"We've had to start from scratch with this comeback," said Mesi's manager and father, Jack. "We're hoping to have two 10-round fights by the end of the year."

Jack Mesi added he didn't know when or where the next fight would be just yet, but that it would most likely take place in November.

Mesi's win over Weiss was the main event on a card at the Little River Casino. He won by a perfect 40-36 score on all three judges' scorecards.

Since beginning his comeback, Mesi has fought in Puerto Rico, Canada, Arkansas and Michigan.

Mesi, the former No. 1 contender to the WBC title, is now ranked 22nd by the organization. He is also ranked 40th in the world by Boxrec.com.

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