

Shutout a fine birthday gift for Spikes

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

One of the overlooked stats in the Buffalo Bills' thrilling 21-0 win over the archrival Miami Dolphins Sunday was one found deep in the Buffalo media guide.

It was linebacker Takeo Spikes's 30th birthday. That's right, on the same day the Bills blew out the Dolphins, Spikes blew out the candles on his birthday cake.

The Bills won, eliminated the Dolphins from the playoff race and kept their own postseason hopes alive for another week. And the shutout is just reassurance that this defense is coming around like the rest of the team.

"Shutouts don't come easy in this league," Spikes said. "To get one (Sunday), at home, this late in the year when it really means something, in December, against the Dolphins when they're playing great football also, it's another step, another level toward where we need to go."

What made the victory even sweeter for Spikes and the rest of the defense was the job they did on Miami quarterback Joey Harrington. Cornerback Nate Clements and linebacker Keith Ellison both intercepted Harrington, who finished with just 20 yards passing and a Bluntarsky-esque 0.0 quarterback rating.

The win evened Buffalo's record at 7-7. The Bills are 5-2 since the bye week after starting the season 2-5. With the playoffs looming and Buffalo's hopes of a postseason berth rising, Spikes and the rest of the team aren't keeping those playoff chances in the back of their minds.

"It's in the front," he said. "It's got to be in the front. But at the same time, we know we have to keep that in front of our minds, because that's the ultimate goal. And once we get in, we'll take it to another level, but we have to win each game from here on out."

Buffalo can clinch an AFC wildcard by winning its two remaining games against Tennessee and Baltimore and having other wildcard contenders, like the Kansas City

Chiefs, Cincinnati Bengals, New York Jets and Denver Broncos lose.

Spikes had a quiet, but steady day for the Bills, wrapping up six tackles against the Dolphins, all in the first half.

Still, it's better than last year, when Spikes sat out his birthday game against the Denver Broncos. Spikes tore his achilles tendon in Week Three and missed the rest of the season. He's still not quite recovered from that injury and has yet to return to his dominating form.

"It was a really good one," Spikes said of his birthday. "Last year, we played Denver on my birthday and I wasn't playing then. (This year) was good."

As much as he enjoyed the win on his birthday, Spikes said that wasn't the best gift he received this year.

"No, actually, I got a Cannon XT camera," he said. "I'm ready to put that bad boy to work."

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Amherst boys swimming ties Tonawanda, loses to Eden

It doesn't happen very often in a high school swim meet but Amherst's boys' team tied Tonawanda, 49-49, last Tuesday.

Amherst overcame a 10-point deficit and scored no diving points to stun the Warriors on the road.

The meet was a nail-biter and came

down to the 400-yard freestyle relay where Amherst's Jacob Hofmar-Glennon, Ryan Menasco, Marshall Davis and Paul Timmel cruised to a first place finish by more than 10 seconds.

Amherst coach Chris Connor said although Tonawanda lost a few of their senior swimmers from last year

(2005-06 record, 13-1, ranked No. 6 in New York State Small Schools), they still fielded a strong squad of 25 and seemed to take his much younger and smaller team very lightly at the beginning of the swim meet.

After Marshall Davis's third place comeback finish in the 50 free, the

tables started to turn for the Tigers.

"During the diving break, we talked to the boys and told them that if they kept putting in a 100 percent effort, we could give this competitive team a real battle," Connor said. "Our experience of losing four meets by four points during the 2005-06 season really helped."

Captains Menasco and Timmel provided some great leadership to keep the team's focus and to keep battling, Connor added.

Several key turning points in the meet came in the 200 free (Timmel, first; Harrison Singer, third), 50 free (Menasco, first; Davis come from behind on last lap for third), 100 fly (Nathan Chau, second; Allen Dengler come from behind on last lap for third), 100 free (Menasco, first; Harrison come from behind on last lap for second), 500 free (Timmel, first; Davis come from behind for third) and 100 back (Hofmar-Glennon, first).

Amherst's 200 free relay of Menasco, Stephen Arlington, Singer and Timmel edged Tonawanda by .25 for first. Timmel overcame a three-second deficit right after swim-

ming the 500 free.

Amherst lost 62-32 against a much stronger and larger Eden team on Friday at Sweet Home High School.

Connor said Eden has 33 swimmers on its roster of which 13 are seniors.

Timmel won the 200 and 500 free then was the second leg on the winning 400 free relay with Menasco, Hofmar-Glennon and Singer.

First-year swimmers Justin Jenkins, Ben Swiatek, Stephen Arlington and Ian Johnson performed personal best times.

Connor also wanted to acknowledge the work of assistant coach Matt Koepfel.

"He has really helped and stepped up to the plate this year," Connor said. "He is really working well with all of the swimmers, especially the younger ones, and reducing the learning curve. His knowledge and support are crucial to the development of this young team."

Amherst swam at Pioneer Tuesday but results were unavailable before The Bee went to press. They return Jan. 2 with a home meet at 4:30 p.m. at Sweet Home against Springfield.

South hockey too much for depleted Tigers squad

Junior Phil Cultrara and sophomore Kevin Denny scored their first goals of the season as Amherst Central hockey fell to league rival Williamsville South, 8-2, last Thursday on the Amherst Pepsi Center's Olympic Rink.

After putting themselves in a tough hole, Denny got the Tigers on the board late in the second period with a beautiful individual play. Denny took the puck in the neutral zone, entered the South end, and fired a beautiful shot from the top of the faceoff circle that beat the South goalie between the legs.

"Kevin was one of the best players on the ice," said Amherst coach Rich Crozier. "He has the capability of being a very good hockey player. His improvement over the last four games has been very impressive. We knew he had the promise to be a good player and it's exciting to see him contribute in his sophomore season."

Despite being down and without three of their top forwards, the Tigers showed life in the third period, outshooting South, 8-7. That effort paid off late in the hockey game when on the power play, Cultrara recorded his goal. Defensemen David Moore kept in a clearing attempt by South. Moore then found Cultrara who was parked all alone in front of the net. Cultrara took the puck from Moore and fired a wrist shot that beat the South goalie low on his glove side.

Freshman Sean Smith played well, recording 33 saves.

"This game was tough on all of us," said Crozier. "We are down three key guys right now and we just don't have the depth when missing some of our top players. I know that with my full team we can be very competitive with South. Unfortunately injuries and suspensions are part of the game. We'll face adversity all year long and there were players who really stepped it up when things became difficult."

South scored four times in the first period from four different goal scorers — Doug Benson (Kevin Winnert),

Adam Oehmler (Winnert), Winnert (Benson) and Dustin Jones (Kevin Cottrell). Benson and Oehmler's goals came on the power play.

Jones (Cottrell) and Greg Potter each added short-handed goals. Greg Reed (Jones, Leo Schultz) and Winnert (Benson) also scored for the Billies, who led 5-1 after the second.

Matt Green made 12 saves.

"It was our first win of the year," said South coach Sean Green. "We got a quick start and that's one of the things we really try to emphasize. Up 4-0 after one really helped us out."

Green really liked the line of Winnert, Benson and Jon Sherman, who combined for four goals.

"They generated a lot of offense with their aggressive forechecking," he said. "That was a nice combination we put together. They were effective all night."

After having the weekend off, the Tigers have a very busy week.

On Tuesday and Wednesday is their Amherst Tigers Holiday Tournament. The Tigers played Section V's Batavia on Tuesday but results were unavailable before The Bee went to press. They face Section V's Rush-Henrietta at 7 p.m. on Wednesday on the Pepsi Center's Olympic Rink. Amherst ends the week with a 3 p.m. game against Sweet Home on the Olympic Rink.

"The next two weeks are the heart of our season," said Crozier. "We need to play well in our Holiday tournament and in Glens Falls (Dec. 27-28) to get a jump start on the second half of our year. We're off to a slow start, but the message in the locker room is that the next couple of weeks can turn things around quickly. With some hard work and a strong effort, we're looking to put some victories together."

(Reporter Patrick J. Nagy contributed to this article)

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS CALENDAR

Wednesday, Dec. 20

Boys Basketball: Sweet Home at Orchard Park, 7:30 p.m.
Girls Basketball: W.S. East at Amherst, 7:30 p.m.
Boys Bowling: W.S. East at East (Transit), 4 p.m.
Girls Bowling: W.S. East at East (Transit), 4 p.m.
Hockey: Amherst Holiday Tourn. — Amherst vs. Rush-Henrietta, 7 p.m. (Olympic)
Wrestling: Amherst at St. Francis, 6 p.m., Sweet Home at Lancaster, 6 p.m., Hamburg at North, 6 p.m., South at W.S. East, 6 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 21

Boys Basketball: Amherst at Newfane, 5:30 p.m., East at Lake Shore, 7:30 p.m.
Girls Basketball: Iroquois at East, 7:30 p.m., North at Sweet Home, 7:30 p.m., Lake Shore at South, 7:30 p.m.
Hockey: Sweet Home vs. East, 7 p.m. (Olympic), North vs. St. Joe's, 7 p.m. (Feature), South vs. Bishop

Timon-St. Jude, 9 p.m. (Olympic)

Friday, Dec. 22

Hockey: Batavia Tourn. — East vs. New Hartford, 3 p.m.
Indoor Track: Amherst, Sweet Home, East, North, South at Fredonia State College, 5 p.m.
Wrestling: Clarence at Sweet Home, 6 p.m., Lancaster at North, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 23

Hockey: Amherst vs. Sweet Home, 3 p.m. (Olympic), North vs. Frontier, 1 p.m. (Feature), South vs. Ken. East, 5 p.m. (Olympic), Batavia Tourn. — East vs. Solvay or Batavia, TBA

Tuesday, Dec. 26

Girls Basketball: Amherst at Mt. St. Mary's Tourn., TBA

Amherst's Pop Warner participants earn All-American honors

At their end of the year banquet, the Amherst Broncos organization recognized the football players and cheerleaders who earned 2006 Academic Excellence awards.

The Amherst Broncos are a member of Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., a not-for-profit organization that provides football and cheer programs to children across the country. It is the only national youth sports organization that requires scholastic aptitude to participate. This season, 14 cheerleaders and 33 football players were presented with certificates of academic excellence for earning a 90 percent or above average for the entire previous school year. Additionally, six of the children qualified for Pop Warner All-American status. Olivia Boyd (98.20), Taylor Balsler (97.00), Justin Twarog (96.40), CJ Westcott (98.56), Mitchell Woite (98.50) and Eric Wilson (98.45) each met the All-American qualifications and exceeded the 96 GPA requirements. Each of the six is eligible for further national recognition, including First and Second Team All-American Honors. These selections will be

based on the student's grades, activities and non-sports related achievements and would render them eligible for scholarships and the National Scholar Banquet in Walt Disney World.

First and Second Team All-American selections will be announced on April 1, 2007.



Amherst Middle School students Justin Twarog, far left, Olivia Boyd and Mitchell Woite earned All-American scholar status with Pop Warner Football and Cheer.

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