

# Super Bowl champion

## Sweet Home grad helps Colts win Super Bowl XLI

by PATRICK J. NAGY  
Reporter

Days after helping the Indianapolis Colts win Super Bowl XLI, Keith O'Neil, a 1999 Sweet Home High School graduate, still can't believe the experience is over.

"I don't think it has really sunk in," O'Neil said in a phone interview last week. "It's funny. I keep reminding myself that the season is over and we won the Super Bowl. It's unbelievable."

O'Neil, a special teams player, started on kickoff return, punt and punt return in the Colts' 29-17 victory over the Chicago Bears in Super Bowl XLI held on Feb. 4 in Miami, Fla.

He did not record a tackle but was pleased with his performance, which included a big block on the Colts' second kick return of the game late in the first quarter.

O'Neil almost didn't play, as a broken rib he suffered during a kickoff in the AFC Championship against the New England Patriots kept him out of practice for a week. He was finally cleared to practice on Jan. 31.

"When it first happened, I told the doctor to tell coach (Tony) Dungy and our special teams coach (Russ Pernel), 'I'm going to play,'" O'Neil said. "If it's just a pain thing, I can play through it."

"That Wednesday practice was painful, but it got a little bit better each day," he added. "It still hurts



Keith O'Neil, center, a 1999 Sweet Home High School graduate, celebrates with his family on the field after helping the Indianapolis Colts win Super Bowl XLI. Also pictured far left, is his father, Ed, his brother, Kevin, his wife, Jill, Kevin's wife, Jill, his mother, Nancy, his sister, Colleen, and his sister-in-law, Jaeme Eddie.

now, but I proved to the coaches that I could practice and with doctor's approval that I could play."

Playing with the injury wasn't as bad as O'Neil thought.

"I think a lot had to do with adrenaline," he said. "There were times when I felt it, but it was the

kind of pain that goes away. It wasn't that constant pain. It's something you have to play through. It's the Super Bowl, so you pretty much do anything to play."

The game didn't start out well for the Colts. The Bears' Devin Hester took the opening kickoff

92 yards for a touchdown, and Chicago would eventually take a 14-6 first-quarter lead. But the Colts took a 16-14 lead into halftime and never trailed again.

"The opening kickoff was almost a nightmare," said O'Neil. "I couldn't believe it, but it was early enough in the game that we

stayed confident, started moving the ball, got ahead of them and it was pretty much in the bag. I think offensively, they never really moved the ball on our defense at all. I also believe that if we would have played them at the RCA Dome (Colts' home field) or in different weather conditions (constant, pouring rain), it could have been a lot worse for them."

O'Neil said he never played an NFL game where it constantly rained.

"It limited our offense," said O'Neil. "There were 12 game balls, and I could remember the quarterbacks complaining about how the balls were water-logged. It made it tough to pass. But Dominic (Rhodes) and Joseph (Addai) had outstanding games. They ran at will in the second half, and they couldn't move the ball at all on our defense. The weather should have benefited the Bears, but I believe we were destined to win."

A little rain also did not stop Keith's family members from leaving their seats.

"I had a Keith O'Neil jersey on with a Colts' T-shirt underneath that was blue because of the dye coming off the jersey from the rain," said Keith's father Ed, a former NFL player for the Detroit Lions and Green Bay Packers. "My wife (Nancy) had a poncho that was soaked through. It didn't matter what happened. We weren't leaving."

(Please turn to page 20)



Brian Wallden scored 36 points, grabbed 22 rebounds and blocked five shots in Williamsville East's 71-53 home win over Williamsville South last Thursday. Also pictured is South's P.J. Coppola.

Photo by Joe Eberle  
Purchase photos at [www.BeeNews.com](http://www.BeeNews.com)

## Wallden powers East hoops over South

by PATRICK J. NAGY  
Reporter

Too much Brian Wallden combined with a lack of defensive effort by Williamsville South led Williamsville East to a 71-53 home win last Thursday.

Wallden finished with 36 points, outrebounded the entire South team, 22-21, and blocked five shots.

"We moved the ball well and got the ball inside to Wallden and they couldn't handle him," said East coach Dennis Belote.

Wallden scored 17 of his 36 in the first half as the Flames opened an 18-17 first quarter advantage to 30-29 by halftime. He scored nine points in the third and added another 10 in the fourth.

East scored the first four points of the second half and would take a 56-39 advantage at the end of the third.

"They played with more intensity," said South coach Al Monaco. "I was real disappointed with our defensive effort. East played very well but we seemed a step slow on everything."

While Wallden dominated inside, East's perimeter game excelled as well, shooting nine three-pointers, including one from Wallden. Many of East's threes were uncontested, Monaco said.

"Them hitting nine three's means we weren't getting the job done in any area," Monaco said.

South (9-9, 8-3) shot just 1 of 12 threes and 12 of

42 from two-point range.

Frank Pieri led South with 16 points and five rebounds. East's Andy Heim (five points, 12 assists) held South's Adrian Wood to 10 points and five rebounds. Spencer McIntyre also chipped in 10 points for the Billies.

East senior Adam Kausch (six points, two threes) kept denying South point guard Mark Coppola the ball and held the freshman to a season-low two assists. Senior Nick Kanutsu (three three's) also defended Coppola.

"He slowed us down," said Monaco of Kausch. "By the time Mark got the ball, we lost our fastbreak opportunity."

East took care of the ball only committing 10 turnovers.

Justin Andreozzi, another East senior, hit two threes and had eight points.

"It was senior night and I started all seniors except for Wallden and they really came through," said Belote.

The loss was crushing for South. The Billies not only fell into a second place tie with East in ECIC Division II but it cost them a possible share of the division title with Amherst.

"It's inexcusable," said Monaco. "The last month we've played without emotion and confidence. I don't know what's happened but we better start playing as well as we're capable of."

East's other game last week was a 62-55 home loss

(Please turn to page 19)