

Commentary

What you talkin' 'bout, Willis?

In a move we all knew was coming because of the media hype surrounding it, former Buffalo Bills running back Willis McGahee was traded last week to the Baltimore Ravens for a third-round pick and seventh-round pick in this year's draft, and a seventh-round pick next year.

Ever since McGahee expressed interest in a new contract before the start of the 2007 season, one year before his contract was set to expire, the Bills made it well aware that the fourth-year tailback was available — for the right price. It was the talk of the NFL combine and several teams seemed interested, including the always running back lucky Denver Broncos.

Both the Bills and I feel like the team got itself a rather good deal in dishing the back to the Ravens. Despite what you feel about McGahee's promise as a runner, we failed to see that potential this year.

Struggling with injury, McGahee never even made it to the 1,000-yard rushing mark this season, which in today's NFL is a must for consideration as a top rusher. For Pete's sake, even former Bill Travis Henry rushed for more than a dime on the ground.

McGahee only had a pair of 100-yard rushing games this past season, both coming against the New York Jets, a team the back excelled against mainly because he was

playing against former college teammate, linebacker Jonathan Vilma. Take those two games out of the mix and McGahee only rushed for 58 yards per game, on average.

In 2003, former General Manager Tom Donahoe took a chance drafting McGahee with the promise of bringing along a running back who could be the future of the organization. They took their time bringing him back from a knee injury, nursing the surprise first-round pick, often telling him that they didn't think he was ready to work out, despite the fact that he felt he was.

Very much like a California vintner cultivates his grapes, the Bills cultivated McGahee and when January rolled around, McGahee was mentally already checked out and, for a running back — a crucial position in the offensive structure — that's never a good spot to be in.

But what does McGahee's willingness to leave say to the people of Western New York? To me, I say, thanks for the slap in the face, Willis. Thanks for turning your back on the people who looked forward

to the day you would start. Thanks for walking away from the end zone fans who hugged you when you dove into their seats after scoring a touchdown.

I'll be blunt about it all; I'm glad to see him go. I'm not really into players who just want to fill a roster spot. If you're not about the team, then shove off, mate. We gave a broken player a chance and he walked away. We showed him the kindness that Western New Yorkers are known for and he took it for granted.

Besides, now that the Bills re-signed veteran Anthony Thomas, and got themselves some much-needed salary cap room, they have some versatility during the draft.

Look for a running back to be taken by the Bills, if not in the first round, in the first three rounds. The Bills are searching right

now for a more versatile back who can run, catch and be used in third down situations — like Marshawn Lynch. Even Louisville's Michael Bush would be a wise pick, though he is not good enough to go in the first round.

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Girls basketball

Sacred Heart runs out of gas in Catholic state semis

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

Sacred Heart gave Notre Dame Academy everything they had in the Class B New York State Catholic High School Athletic Association girls basketball semifinal on Saturday but it wasn't enough to earn the win.

Notre Dame (20-6), who plays in Staten Island, used a relentless man to man defense to outscore Sacred Heart, 35-19, in the second half, including a 14-0 run late in the fourth quarter, en route to a come from behind 58-47 victory at the Charles L. & Gloria B. Lumsden Gymnasium at Daemen College.

Notre Dame (20-6), who was runner-up in the Catholic High School Athletic Association Archdiocesan Class B final, moves on to the Catholic state title game on Sunday at Cardinal Spellman in the Bronx.

"We had a great effort but just couldn't sustain the effort (in the second half)," said Sacred Heart coach Sr. Maria Pares. "I think they were a little quicker, a little bit more aggressive and a lot stronger than we were."

The Sacred Heart-Notre Dame game was part of a semifinal tripleheader. Nardin advanced in Class C after defeating New York Archdiocese champion Preston, 52-37. St. Peter's, the reigning Federation champion, beat Mt. Mercy, 68-43, in Class A.

Notre Dame's Ashley Olson, who is headed to Division I Wagner College, led all scorers with 19 points, including 11 in the second half. Her last four points



Sacred Heart's Katie Keller lets a shot fly past Notre Dame Academy's Ashley Olson during first half action of Saturday's Class B New York State Catholic High School Athletic Association semifinal at Daemen College. The Sharks lost 58-47.

Photo by Joe Eberle
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(layup from Lauren Chicolo, two fourth quarter surge. Olson's free throws) sparked the Gators' teammate, junior Hannah Tait (16

points), hit two three-pointers in the run.

"I have played four years of varsity and I didn't want this to be the last second half (in high school) that I played," said Olson, who had averaged 26 points in Notre Dame's first two playoff games.

The Sharks, who shot 19 of 36 in the game and 11 of 20 in the first half, used hot shooting from Krystal Watson (four points), Natalie Coppola (six points), and Meaghan Daley (six points) to open a 16-7 first

quarter lead. Sacred Heart built a 22-11 advantage midway through the second quarter before Notre Dame woke up and outscored Sacred Heart, 12-6, the rest of the half.

At halftime, Notre Dame coach John Hannafin told his team to tighten up its defense and drive to the hoop and the Gators responded. Brittany Zinke, who was a thorn on defense all game against the Sharks, stole the ball from Watson and threw a long pass to Sam Salvatore, who laid it in to tie the game at 28-28 two minutes into the second half.

The lead would bounce back and forth in the third with a turnaround jumper from Salvatore giving Notre Dame a 40-39 advantage at the end of the third quarter.

"Our defense carries our of-

fense," said Hannafin. "That's the way it's been for us all season."

Sacred Heart's last lead, 45-42, came early in the fourth quarter courtesy of an inside layup from Watson. The Sharks were held scoreless for about five minutes as the Gators went on their run.

Sacred Heart committed most of their 15 turnovers in the second half despite shooting 8 of 16 from the floor.

"I got to give Notre Dame credit but I give my kids credit," said Pares. "I really thought the second half was the difference. They beat us down the court every single time. They're a very good team."

Watson finished with 12 points, nine rebounds and four assists. Daley and Katie Keller each scored 10. Coppola grabbed six rebounds.

Sacred Heart finishes 23-3. Keller, Daley, Gina Ricotta, Liz Subjeck and Katelyn Killian graduates. Pares said the loss does not diminish a great season.

"I would have liked to have won this game and have beaten Mt. Mercy (lost 42-38 in Monsignor Martin Association finals on March 4)," said Pares. "This has been one of the nicest and hardest working groups I've coached."

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— Sacred Heart coach Sr. Maria Pares

Sweet Home to host powerlifting championships

Many of the area's top high school powerlifters will converge at Sweet Home High School for the 36th annual New York State Powerlifting Championships.

The event will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, March 17 at Sweet Home, 1901 Sweet Home Road, Amherst.

Between 150 to 200 athletes are scheduled to appear. Schools who have already committed to appear include last year's champion, North Tonawanda, Sweet Home, who placed third, Kenmore East, Niagara-Wheatfield, Liverpool of Section III (Syracuse), Churchville-Chili



and Letchworth of Section V (Rochester).

Weigh-ins will be held from 8:15 to 9:15 a.m. World record powerlifter Paul Childress, who competed in the event in the late 1980's, will perform proper lifting techniques.

Athletes will have three attempts to squat, bench press, and dead lift. The top three attempts from each event are added for a total score.

Money raised will go towards the Sweet Home track team and the school's fitness center.

Sponsors include Dick's Sporting Goods, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Upstate Milk, and Manhattan Bagel.

