

## Commentary

# What is going on with the Bills?

A day after the Buffalo Bills took a 38-7 drubbing from the New England Patriots to open the season 0-3, the talk in the media room at the Buffalo Bills Fieldhouse was how long it might take to see a win in Buffalo.

Some writers said the Bills' ineptitude could endure all the way to Week 10. And even that matchup against AFC East rival Miami wasn't a gimme in the general consensus.

Fans were outraged that a team that showed such promise at the end of the 2006 season could play so badly at the start of the year. It got so bad, people actually cheered when starting quarterback J.P. Losman suffered a knee injury on the first play of that defeat to the Patriots.

But here we stand in Week 14, seeing the 6-6 Bills remain alive and well in the thick of the AFC playoff race, a concept that seemed laughable back in September. It seemed even more ludicrous when players began dropping like the black plague had hit the locker room. You can't send 12 players to the injured reserve list and still dish out defeats to your opponents, can you?

But here we are watching a team win with the 31st ranked offense in the league, the 30th ranked defense and a points differential of minus-90 dispatching teams

and making a serious run toward a playoff spot.

How the heck did we get here?

This whole season seems surreal. At first, it appeared as though evil forces conspired against the Bills. How else could you explain losing that Week Five game to Dallas, 25-24, with a last-second field goal after the Bills had forced six turnovers on defense and scored twice on interception returns? Then there was that humiliating 56-10 beatdown from the Patriots in Week 11, which broke a 30-year old record for worst loss in franchise history. Surely, bad hoodoo was at work.

But despite the bad games — don't forget that stomach-punch loss in the opener to Denver — and the poor play on both sides of the ball, the Bills still hold fate in their own hands and could lock up one of the wildcard positions with a few more wins.

Maybe the Bills are using black magic to somehow come out on top, or maybe they have an angel sitting their shoulders. Because a team with this many problems shouldn't be winning.

Buffalo sits eighth in the AFC, just one game behind the Tennessee Titans (7-5) and Cleveland Browns (7-5). The Bills need to leapfrog both of those teams to secure the final playoff berth, which won't be easy.

But Buffalo has a golden opportunity with a Week 15 matchup against the Browns in Cleveland. Yes, the stars are lining up to give Bills fans a chance to see the playoffs for the first time since 1999.

But for that to happen, Buffalo must get better on both sides of the ball. The offense is churning out an anemic 274.8 yards per game, while the defense is giving up 370.4. Buffalo has scored 184 points, while allowing 274. That differential is 28th in the league.

Or perhaps the best thing the Bills can do is just keep on keeping on. Scoring field goals instead of touchdowns has worked all season, whether it's Losman or Trent Edwards leading the offense. Why change what's working, no matter how bizarre it is? Who cares if it doesn't make any sense, as long as it's working?



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## New

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ourney), get stronger and focus on the mental part of the sport.

"The injury did not set me back," said Stella, who is looking at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Edinboro University or the University at Buffalo as possible colleges. "I've gotten a lot better since then. Before I got the surgery, I was weak in my left arm. Now I'm twice as strong. I also learned more over the summer by going to clinics and watching what people were doing. I paid attention to every detail."

Hess expects Stella to be ranked No. 1 in Western New York once rankings come out. Hess said Stella will go wherever the competition is around his weight class.

"We're looking for the toughest competition for a dual match," said Hess. "Nic will lose weight or bump his weight up to face the best kids."

That includes a possible matchup with Lancaster's Mark Lewandowski, who took second in the state last year at 125.

Stella is co-captain with senior Matt Danwin, who lost a bunch of close matches at 130 pounds last year before bowing out with a dislocated shoulder in the middle of the season. Danwin will compete at 135.

"If we had him in the lineup for the entire season, we probably would have had a better record at the end of the year (Sweet Home finished 2-7)," said Hess. "He's a hard worker and is not afraid to take on

anybody. He's does whatever is better for the team. He doesn't say a lot in the (wrestling room) but he doesn't have to."

Another wrestler who should add to Sweet Home's success is sophomore Gage Bateman, who was the only other Panther to advance to the state qualifier after taking second at the Class AAAA tournament. He also won the Salamanca tournament. Bateman finished 22-11 at 112. He will compete at 130 this season.

"He wrestles with 100 percent of his heart," said Hess. "When he's out there, he's able to pull a lot of matches out in the third period because he never gives up. A lot of guys get tired in the last couple of seconds in a match. That's when he really turns it on."

Bateman's father, Glen, a former state champion at 168 pounds, will serve as an assistant coach.

The rest of the lineup is comprised of freshman Anthony Mineo or eighth-grader Mike White (96); senior Joe Hirtreiter (145) and sophomores Daiquann Burney (103), Zach Fumerelle (125), Alex Dennis (152), Cory Mitchum (160), Nico Fisher and senior Dave Rhodes (189 or 215).

Hess said Fumerelle lost several close matches by one or two points to top-ranked wrestlers but has put a ton of work in the offseason.

"He wrestled all summer long," said Hess. "Even during the football season, he

would come up from football practice, take a shower and go to UB four days a week to train with (New York) Super Six (Wrestling). I think he's going to step up this year."

Last year, Burney weighed the minimum for 103 last year and was always giving up weight, said Hess.

"Now he's at a natural weight," said Hess. "I think he could surprise us and go to sectionals."

Hess said Dennis was an "animal" on JV.

"He's the most intense wrestler on the team and that includes Nic," said Hess. "He's super aggressive. As soon as the whistle blows, he's an animal."

Hirtreiter can wrestle anywhere from 125 to 145.

"He's another guy who could be a huge difference between us losing a match by a couple of points or winning," said Hess.

Fisher, Rhodes or first-year junior wrestler Mark Orłowski could wrestle at some point at 215.

Junior Jesse Jackiewicz will see time at 140.

Hess said the team is a great attitude heading into the season.

"They want to take on anyone and are willing to do whatever to help the team win," said Hess. "That's going to make us a better team."

Sweet Home opened its season tying for fourth at the Tonawanda Duals Tourna-

ment. (see attaches story). They host Williamsville East in a non-league dual at 6 p.m. on Friday. Its the first time Zach Fumerelle will face his uncle, Henry, coach of the Flames.

### Sweet Home 2007 Schedule

12-7 East.....	6 p.m.
12-12 Orchard Park.....	6 p.m.
12-19 Lancaster.....	6 p.m.
12-21 at Clarence.....	6:30 p.m.
12-28 at Akron Holiday Tournament (Akron).....	9 a.m.
1-4 at NCCC Officials Tournament (Niagara County Community College)...	TBA
1-5 at NCCC Officials Tournament (Niagara County Community College). TBAA	
1-9 Frontier.....	6 p.m.
1-16 at North.....	6 p.m.
1-18 at ECIC tourn. (East Aurora) 4:30 p.m.	
1-19 at ECIC tourn. (East Aurora) 9 a.m.	
1-25 Sweet Home tourn. (Sweet Home)	TBA
1-26 Sweet Home tourn. (Sweet Home) TBA	
1-30 at W.S. West.....	6 p.m.
2-1 Hamburg.....	6 p.m.
2-2 at Salamanca Tournament.....	TBA
2-6 at Jamestown.....	6 p.m.
2-15 at Class AAAA Tournament. (Clarence).....	4:30 p.m.
2-16 at Class AAAA Tournament. (Clarence).....	9:30 a.m.
2-23 Section VI New York State qualifier (Ken West).....	10 a.m.

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## Sweet Home ties for fourth at dual tourney; Stella named most outstanding

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**  
Reporter

In only its first outing of the season, the Sweet Home wrestling team has already matched its win total for dual matches.

The Panthers, who finished 2-7 last year, beat the Gow School, 49-24, and Lackawanna, 37-27, as part of the Tonawanda Duals Tournament held last Saturday at Tonawanda High School. They lost their other three duals at the tournament to Hamburg, 38-22; Cheektowaga, 50-17; and to Section V's Holley, 39-33.

Sweet Home finished tied for fourth with Tonawanda out of eight teams. The Panthers won their matches without a full lineup. They were missing 145-pound (Joe Hirtreiter) and 189-pound (forfeit) wrestlers.

"We could have easily been 3-2, but we didn't do well early," said

Sweet Home coach Jeff Hess. "We probably would have won against Hamburg had we had our 145-pounder in the lineup and didn't forfeit at 189."

Nic Stella went 5-0 at 140 pounds (all pins) and was named the tournament's most outstanding wrestler. Stella pinned the Gow's Henry Henson and Lackawanna's Eric Jones in 15 and 21 seconds, respectively, Hamburg's Brett Phillips in 1:35, Holley's Josh Avila in 2:19 and Cheektowaga's Steve Kelly in 2:30.

"He looked better at this point than he did last year," said Sweet Home coach Jeff Hess. "The one difference about Nic this year is that he is holding down his opponents for pins. Last year, kids would roll through and he would get technical falls."

Other Sweet Home wrestlers who excelled were senior Matt Danwin and sophomores Alex Dennis and Gage Bateman.

Danwin went 5-0 at 135 pounds, including three pins. Bateman and Dennis were 4-1 at 130 and 152 pounds, respectively.

Dennis had four pins. His only loss came to Cheektowaga's Clay Reeb, 18-3. Hess said Reeb is expected to be ranked first at his weight class in Section VI.

Bateman's only defeat came to Cheektowaga's Jared Messina, a two-time section champion, 9-1.

Bateman pinned two of his other opponents.

Sophomore Zach Fumerelle went 3-2 at 125, including a huge win over Cheektowaga's Keann Loman.

Cory Mitchum, another sophomore, pushed 20 pounds to wrestle at 171. He finished 2-3. Mitchum usually wrestles at 154. He won one match on JV last year.

The Panthers' lightweights, eighth-grader Michael White (96 pounds) and freshman Anthony Mineo (103 pounds), each went 3-2. Mineo had two pins.

Sophomore Daiquann Burney went 2-3 at 112 pounds.

Sophomore Nico Fisher won his first varsity match at 215 by pinfall.

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## Youth hockey

# Squirt Devils' persistence pays off

The Squirt Devils came back to beat the Stars, 5-3.

Trailing the Stars 2-0, Squirt Devil Tommy Heyden (unassisted) and teammate Jonah Held (Frankie Bodami) tied the game.

Joe DeMarco (Ricky Bruno, Josh Gilbert) gave the Stars a 3-2 lead but 46 seconds later, Held (Bodami) scored again.

At 7:52 of the third, Bodami (Held) scored what amounted to be the game winner. At 6:13, Sal DiNatale (Justin Presutti) buried an insurance goal.

Bruno and Nick Peters scored the Stars' first two goals.

Goalie Nick Molnar was a huge part of the Devils success, saving 41 of 44 shots.