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From the Publisher

There will be some big changes in the NFL Draft this year. The weekend that NFL fans look forward to all offseason now extends into midweek, with the first round to stand alone on Thursday night. Rounds Two and Three take place the following day, and the traditional "second day" picks are now slated for day three.

Some things don't change, however. The Buffalo Bills will look to fill a number of holes in the draft. Chief among them are offensive line and backup quarterback. Fans certainly have their opinion about what moves to make, but if history is any guide, the Bills will have some surprises in store. We break down what we

think they'll do later in this issue.

With the football season about to unofficially kickoff, hockey is in full sprint as we enter the playoffs. After two years of near misses and injuries, the Sabres are back in the postseason after winning the Northeast Division. They are slotted in the No.3 seed against No.6 Boston after quite literally being in contention for second place until three seconds before the regular season ended.

After a coming-out party on the Olympic stage, Ryan Miller should figure heavily down the stretch. Also shoring up the defense will be Calder front-runner Tyler Myers. It wasn't easy to catch up with the big guy but *Sports & Leisure* spoke

with Myers about the season and to Myers teammates about the nimble, 6-foot-8, behemoth.

Like father, like son, or in this case like NHL franchise, like AHL club. The Portland Pirates will be joining the post-season rush as they compete for their second Calder Cup. Not one to be counted out, the Rochester Americans are also in the mix. Does anyone sense a rematch of the 1996 AHL finals coming?

April also means the return of baseball, with the International League springing back into action along with the Majors. We take a look at the area teams that will be sharing our summer nights in person or on the radio dial.

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Tyler Myers towers over Calder competition

By George Kuhn

When Darcy Regier traded up for the 12th overall pick in the 2008 NHL Entry Draft neither the local media or fans had any idea that Regier's astute move would land the Sabres one of their most outstanding prospects ever. Regier had identified 12 elite prospects in that draft but without a top 12 pick, and knowing that he needed new blood for an aging defense corps, he acquired the 12th pick, which guaranteed him a shot at an elite talent. To say that Regier knew what he was doing would be an understatement. As the Hockey News stated when ranking Myers as the top NHL rookie earlier this season, "Myers is contributing important minutes on one of the best defensive teams in the league. And he's doing it while going up against the NHL's best forwards. If anyone saw this coming two years ago let us know." Someone should give Darcy The Hockey News' phone number.

Tyler Meyers has become arguably the second most popular athlete among Buffalo sports fans trailing only Ryan Miller's iconic 'rock star' presence. Terrell Owens never had a chance. At 6-foot-8, Myers towers over his NHL competition. His wide reach makes it almost impossible for opponents to get around him. Myers combines strong defensive ability with outstanding offensive skill. He plays defense as effectively as all-time Sabres great Bill Hajt yet skates the puck up ice and attacks like ex-Sabre Phil Housley. Meyers' game is an outstanding combination of two-way play without compromising his defensive



Photo by Jeff Barnes

Tyler Myers has shown almost unlimited potential in his first NHL season.

responsibilities.

Myers has made quite an impression on the NHL this season. Keith Jones of the NHL Network says that Myers is "heads above his fellow rookies" including Boston goaltender Tukka Rask who leads the NHL in goals against average and save percentage. Sabres teammate Derek Roy marvels at Myers work defensively. "He doesn't get (enough) credit," Roy explained. He has a lot of blocked shots for us. He's first in blocked shots by a lot. He works so hard in the defensive zone. He gets up ice and is huge for us offensively. He's just a great powerhouse for us. He's poised and he makes you make the

first move and then he takes you out. He's got that long stick. Even if you think you've got him he puts that stick out and you've got no room to go. He's definitely good defensively."

Roy feels that the same physical abilities that help Myers in the defensive zone also helps him offensively. "His reach is beyond the reach of the average forward so he gets by those guys quick and he can skate up the ice. You wouldn't think he's a first year guy if you watched him play. He's not only one of the top rookies he's one of the better defensemen in the league for sure."

Tyler Myers was a revelation at training camp accord-

ing to Sabres defenseman Toni Lydman. "He had a good training camp but not at the level he's at now. For me he was a bit of a surprise coming to training camp. We knew he was good but didn't know how good. It became clear pretty quickly that this guy was for real. He's done a great job for us. He has just grown as a player working with James Patrick and the coaching staff and with the rest of the guys trying to give him a heads up on how to play. He listens, he wants to get better and he works tremendously hard in practice and in every game."

How good can Myers become after he develops his abilities and gets some experience? "He's got to fill in a little bit more, get bigger, stronger, faster. He's got to learn a little bit more," Roy said. Toni Lydman feels that Myers' future is rather promising. "If you look at where he's at if the progression keeps going the same way it'll be only a few years before he's a candidate for the Norris Trophy. I know that's

this at all. For me the biggest thing is always wanting more and never being satisfied. It wasn't just me. There were a lot of people around me that have allowed me to have the year I did."

For Myers, adapting to the NHL was more a matter of enhancing his mental awareness rather than meeting the league's physical demands. "The speed of the game was what I noticed more than anything. The way guys worked together they're so much quicker, the passes are so much quicker. It made me realize that I've got to think the game much quicker. That's been a bigger adjustment for me than anything physical. As the season went on I was gaining more confidence. As a young guy I really had to focus on staying as consistent as I could. Some games I felt more fatigued than others and I tried to keep my game simple and that was a big part of the season for me to stay consistent and keep my confidence high."

Myers appreciates that the

Sabres fan base has embraced him. "It's nice to have that but there's a lot of other guys who do a lot for this team. The excitement that the fans have shown this year for the team has been unbelievable. I'm sure they're just as excited as we are to be going to the playoffs."

The Sabres had one of the NHL's highest scoring defense corps with 30 goals this season, which helped the offense on a team that sometimes finds their forwards struggling to score more than one or two goals per game. Myers himself has scored 11 of those goals and his offensive style of play has inspired his fellow defenders to copy him. "After watching Tyler play the rest of us have done a better job joining the rush" Lydman said. "I think you have to learn and it doesn't matter what age you are at. I certainly wasn't a teacher at that age, that's for sure. I was learning from the older guys."

Sabres Coach Lindy Ruff feels that Myers has established himself as an NHL player. "He's been consistent. He's had a pretty consistent year. You wonder if there's going to be a drop-off. You wonder if he goes through a tough stretch how he's going to rebound. How he rebounds from tough games. He's answered most of those questions. He's answered questions about going on long road trips and grinding out four games in six nights. He's answered the question about whether he can play big minutes in back to back games. When you look at all those different questions and situations that he's played in he's played very well through it all."

"The playoffs are a whole new ballgame. Everyone knows that in the playoffs everybody's game needs to be elevated and the details need to be greater through a seven game series," Ruff explained. "I feel that where his game is at right now, that we need to get his game to a little higher level. But I think he's shown at different levels particularly at the World Junior Tournament that he's that type of player."

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2010 Baseball season starts with same end in sight

By Bob Plezia

Talk to most MLB managers in April, and they will all tell you they are better and stronger than last season and will compete for the division title and get into the playoffs.

Watching most Florida-based spring training teams, looking at their trades, prospects and talking to their players and coaches, you would have to agree; most of the top teams are better and stronger now than last year.

If you look at the field, however, it seems like the Yanks and Phillies will meet in October, again.

The Yanks lost Johnny Damon (OF) and Hideki Matsui (DH) but they have added Javier Vazquez (P), Curtis Granderson (OF) and Nick Johnson, (IB, DH). They have the

top fielding and hitting infield in baseball with Alex Rodriguez (3B), Derek Jeter (SS), Robinson Cano (2B) and Mark Teixeira (1B). They now have a very good, complete pitching rotation and top closer in Mariano Rivera, even at 40. Jorge Posada at 38 is a concern, but Francisco Cervelli is the future and about ready.

The Yanks play in arguably the toughest division in baseball, but unless circumstances change, it's tough to see anyone beating them in the division or playoffs today.

The Phillies strengthened their pitching adding Roy Halladay, a rebounding Cole Hamels, an improving closer Brad Lidge and added infield defense with Polanco (3B). They have solid vets like Jimmy Rollins (SS), Chase Utley (2B), Ryan Howard (1B), Shane Victorino (CF), Raul Ibanez (OF) and ageless 47-year-old veteran Jamie Moyer (P). We expect the Braves and Marlins to be more competitive in the division but the Phillies are too strong, on paper, and at this time could go all the way to the World Series in 2010.

One could argue Boston has the second-best team in baseball, but being in the Yanks division means they will probably have to get by the Bombers to earn a World Series appearance. Adding Marco Scutaro (SS) and Adrian Beltre (3B) with Dustin Pedroia and Kevin Youkilis, it gives them a much better infield than last year. The other additions of John Lackey (P) and Mike Cameron (CF) give the Red Sox some depth. But who will DH? Ortiz really struggled last year and didn't look any better this spring. Lowell played some games at first, but hip problems linger: he's 36 and missing most games the last two seasons, he

might not be with the Sox for long. Jason Bay is gone. Daisuke Matsuzaka is having some problems rehabbing, so



Photo courtesy Bob Plezia
Mark McGuire, new hitting coach with St. Louis, and Bob Plezia at 2010 Spring Training.

at this time it's hard to say what he will contribute. J.D. Drew seemed to have some pop back in his bat this spring so he should help on offense this season, and Victor Martinez will catch and add offense also.

The Twins suffered a major blow losing Joe Nathan to season-ending Tommy John surgery recently so the outlook for the Twins is to battle Detroit for the division. Joe Mauer is the standard behind the plate and recently signed a long-term contract with the Twins. Justin Morneau and new DH Jim Thome should add offense. The other additions of Orlando Hudson (2B) and J.J. Hardy (SS) give the Twins more options. Playing in a new open stadium in April and May in Minn. may be tough and if they don't come out strong early, it will put pressure on the team later in the season as the weather warms.

The Cards look strong. Having Matt Holliday for a full season along with two of baseball's top starters in Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright, an All-Star closer, and a number of young developing players should make the Cards one of the more balanced teams in baseball. After adding Mark McGwire as the new hitting coach to one of the best pitching coaches in baseball, Tony LaRussa implied that the Cards should go deep into the playoffs this season.

I had the opportunity to talk with both LaRussa and McGwire about McGwire's new job, and observed McGwire during pre-game BP. If you know LaRussa's background, he is a student of the game as well as people, and very innovative. For his part, McGwire was impressive when talking of his batting experience and performance in MLB over his

16 years and what he brings to coaching and teaching. He is passionate about hitting, has a strong work ethic according to LaRussa, and knows he has things to learn, but feels he will improve the Cards batting and execution.

Detroit skipper Jim Leyland is happy with his starting rotation of Justin Verlander, Rick Porcello and Max Scherzer, and has pitchers like J e r e m y Bonderman, Phil Coke, Dontrelle Willis, Galarraga, etc. fighting for the other slots. Damon fits very well at DH and ahead in a lineup of vets that includes Miguel Cabrera (1B) and Magglio Ordonez (OF). Rookie Austin Jackson (CF) has added more range in the outfield.

The Angels have had a fair amount of player changes since last season losing John Lackey (P), letting go of Chone Figgins (INF) and Vladimir Guerrero (OF) and adding the ex-Yankee Matsui (DH). Give Mike Scioscia, one of the best managers in baseball today, time to figure it out.

With Seattle adding Cliff Lee (P), Figgins (INF) and Milton Bradley (OF) alongside vets like Felix Hernandez (P), Ichiro Suzuki (OF) and Ken Griffey Jr. (OF), they could dethrone the Angels in the American West this year. A Bradley meltdown would hurt the team though.

With this being Manny Ramirez's last year with the Dodgers, the distraction of the owner's divorce and the future of manager Torre in question, the Rockies could win the NL West.

If the Rockies' bullpen stays as strong as it was last season (an NL-best 45 saves), and the offense with Todd Helton (1B), Troy Tulowitzki (SS), Brad Hawpe (RF) produces, they could carry starting rotation and win the division title.

I had the opportunity to spend some time with Yankees hitting coach Kevin Long, Phillies skipper Charlie Manuel and Blue Jays manager Cito Gaston, a former teammate of mine in the Braves organization. I also spoke with Peter Gammons and talked a lot about hitting but also the upcoming season. Because of a long season, injuries, and some surprise overachievers and underachievers, the final results could be very different than what expect now.

Play ball!

Fantasy baseball

By Mike Fox

The good news for fantasy leaguers is the 2010 pitcher pool is loaded with players who could easily produce ace-level stats. The bad news is, well, they're pitchers, which means they're all more unpredictable than Milton Bradley after four cups of strong coffee. It's all a matter of picking your poison.

If your usual modus operandi is to invest heavily in at least one anchor stud, you likely salivate at the mere mention

of Roy Halladay. "Doc" has been a true workhorse, with four consecutive seasons of 220+ innings pitched. Even more remarkable in this era of niche relievers are his 25 complete games over the past three seasons, by far the most in the majors over that time. The longtime Toronto ace moves to a more hitter-friendly park in Philadelphia, but that should be more than offset by the fact that he'll now be backed by the potent Phillies offense, and won't have to serve as an ace against the beasts of the AL East. Tim Lincecum's Cy Young streak could be in



Photo MLB pressbox

Cole Hamels will reward those who consider 2009 their aberration seasons, not 2008.

jeopardy.

Others who should be paid like true aces: C.C. Sabathia NYY, Lincecum SF, Dan Haren ARZ, Felix Hernandez SEA, Zack Greinke KC.

If your budget or game plan prevents you from locking down one of the aforementioned aces, don't worry, as there are a host of young players poised to make a Felix Hernandez-type leap in the fantasy rankings. One of the more intriguing is Clayton Kershaw, whose frequent comparisons to Sandy Koufax are not all because of the fact he wears Dodger

blue. At the age of 21, Kershaw held hitters to a ML-leading .200 average and averaged better than a strikeout per inning, so we know he can miss bats, and he pitches for a strong team in an extreme pitcher's park. If he can reduce the number of free passes (almost five walks per nine innings pitched in 2009), the sky's the limit.

The same can be said for budding Brewer Yovani Gallardo, who traded in his "injury risk" label for a "future All-Star" label after registering the first of what

should be many 200 K seasons in 2009. Like Kershaw, only a troublingly-high walk rate separates him from greatness.

Cole Hamels and Chad Billingsley were thought to be headed for stardom after their stellar 2008 seasons, but both instead took a step backwards in 2009. Hamels regressed across the fantasy scoring board as his ERA rose from 3.09 to 4.32, with only 10 wins to show for his 32 starts. Billingsley ripped it up for the first three months of 2009 before falling apart in the second

continued on page 9

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Weber and Pirates ride defense to AHL playoffs

By Casey Fenton

Since Portland stumbled out of the blocks to start the season, they have turned their year around and have clinched a playoff spot. A franchise record 11-game winning streak helped to propel the Pirates to second place in their division and third in the entire Eastern conference. The Division came down to the final games of the season but the Pirates narrowly missed overtaking the Worcester Sharks by a game and a half.

The year started with the Pirates losing 12 of their first 18 games, but since then they have gone 38-12-5-2, including a blistering 8-0-2-1 since March 13.

Despite the rough start, both the players and coaching staff knew the team was too talented to not make a run. "We started with a lot of young guys," explained head coach Kevin Dineen. "As their play improved and they got used to the system, the record coincided with that."

"We come in every year expecting to fight to make the playoffs," defenseman Mike Weber said. "We knew we had a great team, a young team, but lots of potential to go far. Our goal from day one has been to put ourselves in good position to win a championship."

Portland's NHL club, the Buffalo Sabres, recently wrapped up their division with the help of Pirate call-up Tyler Ennis, who had a goal and two assists in the clinching game. The Pirates would love to match that team accomplishment; they haven't won a division crown since 2005-06. Buffalo called upon other Pirates this season besides Ennis, such as forwards Nathan Gerbe and Mark Mancari, Portland's leading scorer.

The call-ups may have inadvertently helped the Pirates in a way also. Dineen explains, "Every

time someone is called up, it really gives a jolt to those who didn't. They've stepped up into their roles and more responsibilities."



Photo courtesy Portland Pirates

Portland defenseman Mike Weber leads the Pirates into the postseason with a team high 20 +/- rating.

Players such as Kyle Rank, Cody McCormick and Rochester native Derek Whitmore have all set career highs in multiple offensive statistical categories this season.

"That's the thing with the AHL," Weber said. "Every night the lineup is a little different. You have to be mentally focused, both as an individual and a team standpoint, to play with whatever or whomever you have."

Even with the offensive scoring depth that has shown in response to Buffalo call-ups, the Pirates turnaround has really come from the defensive side of the ice. Killing power plays and limiting shots have steadily increased as the team's record improved.

"We've taken a lot of pride defensively," Dineen said. "The record and stats show that."

One of the most consistent players defensively has been Weber. He is the only member of the Pirates to appear in every game this season, and leads the team in +/- with +20.

Weber was injured during last year's playoffs where Portland, as a four seed, fell in the first round against the

top-seeded Providence Bruins. Weber says the disappointment is what motivated him this season. "It was a personal goal of mine coming in to have a healthy season. I've been able to maintain myself, and my hat's off to the team's trainers and doctors."

With Weber's consistency and the young players progressing quickly, Dineen thinks the team has proven it can play with anyone in the league with many of their players, such as Ennis, proving they are NHL caliber.

"We've grown as the season has gone on," Weber said. "We have got into a good group, like a family. We know each other a lot better and it shows when we play."

The Pirates family has three games remaining in the final weekend of the regular season: Manchester, Lowell and then first place Worcester Sharks.

"We have to set ourselves up to make [Worcester] a meaningful game," Dineen said. "Our goals are to clinch home ice in the first round. I hate the theory of 'looking at one game at a time' but we have Manchester as a probable first round opponent and all three games have playoff implications."

Weber echoes those sentiments, "We must win every game here. We want to go into the playoffs on a high note."

This year, Portland is 7-1-1 against Manchester, 5-3-1 against Lowell and 3-2-1-1 versus the Sharks. Manchester, however, is just as hot as Portland going 8-1-0-1 in their last ten.

"Our last three games are for making sure we're sharp," Weber explained. "We have to remember when we go [on the ice] that it's easy, we're ready for this and just have to play."

If confidence continues to remain high, the club hopes to be playing for its first Calder Cup trophy since 1994.

Bisons look to erase memory of bad first impression with new affiliation

By Charles Roberts

Last year there was a feeling of the unknown as the Bisons opened the gates to the media for the first time since returning back from spring training. There were a lot of question marks. It was the first year in the New York Mets' system, which quite obviously meant a new way of thinking and a new cast of characters from top to bottom.

The outcome was not a favorable one in Buffalo or in the Big Apple.

This year however, despite the gun metal skies above, smiles were bright among management and players that spoke amidst their first practice at Coca-Cola Field and the mood seemed to be a very confident one - which is certainly a dramatic difference from the doom and gloom that lingered throughout the clubhouse last season.

"I already forgot about last year," Bisons manager Ken Oberkfell said. "We've got a lot more experience this year. We've got some veteran players and we've got some pretty good young prospects."

If spring training is an indication of how we're going to do, we played pretty well and solid so hopefully we can carry that into the regular season," Oberkfell added.

If Oberkfell hit the nail on the head with his spring training reference, the Bisons should be far more competitive than a year ago. The Bisons posted a 7-0-2 record this year, outscoring their opponents by a count of 53-25 - by all accounts a massive turnaround from last year, where they dropped their first four in the exhibition season.

They would go on to limp to a 2-16 mark in April in 2009, which was by far the team's worst opening month in the Modern Era. This year's team managed to rattle off six consecutive before finishing in a tie. If the spring record is indeed any indication of this club's potential, they should right the ship.

The key in the spring for the Bisons boils down to one thing - offense. Last year the only adjective appropriate to describe the offense was quite simply - offensive. It's early, but it looks like the Mets' brass made it a point to correct the problem that led to far too many one and two-



Photo courtesy Buffalo Bisons

The son of a former Yankee, Ike Davis hopes to make his own mark in New York with the Mets.

run performances in Buffalo.

"The main thing is we've got some offense," Oberkfell said. "We've got power, we've got speed and we've got guys that can play the game."

Looking at it on paper, this year's squad would have almost no choice but to be better, as they have added a handful of players, both veteran and prospects that are considered capable, if not elite hitters.

Topping the list of new young players to keep an eye on is Ike Davis, the son of former New York Yankees reliever Ron Davis. The 6-foot-5 23-year-old was the Mets' first selection in 2008 and is widely considered their first baseman of the future.

Davis brings a strong arm and excellent fielding skills, while at the plate he has quick bat speed and is a very consistent hitter. Last year - all in the minors - Davis hit .333, slugged 20 home runs and accounting for 114 RBI.

"I'm really excited to have a chance to play at the Triple-A level," Davis said as he looked around the stadium, surrounded by a contingent of local media. "Buffalo's a great town, beau-

tiful stadium, looking for a place to live right now and I'm ready to get the season started."

Aside from Davis' stay in Class-A and AA last year, his resume includes experiences with Team USA, the College World Series and most recently the Arizona Fall League, where he hit an astounding .390.

"This guy's legit, he's a good player," a wide-eyed Oberkfell said referring to Davis.

Returning to the team is last year's top-rated prospect, Fernando Martinez, who had an excellent spring with the Mets, hitting .383 (18-47) with four doubles, two triples, three home runs and 11 RBIs in 21 games. The Mets will be watching him closely, but while he's in Buffalo, Oberkfell said he expects to play him in every position in the outfield.

Although the Mets have thrown a few veterans into the fold such as long-time Bisons killer Mike Hessman and Mike Cervenak, Oberkfell contends that his youngsters will see more than enough action.

"They're going to see (Josh) Thole, Davis and Martinez get everyday at bats," Oberkfell said. "They'll get their days off here and there, but having those guys and guys like Cervenak, Chris Carter, Mike Hessman - veterans that have played in this league - gives us that veteran leadership that helps take a little pressure off these younger players."

As it looks now, the Bisons' starting pitching rotation should look something like this: Tobi Stoner (opening day starter), R.A. Dickey, Pat Misch, Dillon Gee and Adam Pettyjohn. All signs point to Eddie Kunz as the primary closer.

The Bisons opened the regular season on April 8 in Scranton Wilkes-Barre, beginning a grueling front-loaded schedule that gives them only two days off in April and May (54 days), including 27 straight games to get things started.

Roller coaster season for Bandits

By Gregory J. Kowalczyk

As the 2010 NLL season heads into its final months, it hasn't really gone as planned for the Buffalo Bandits. After starting 0-4 and dealing with multiple injuries throughout the year, the Bandits climbed out of a hole to bring their record to an even (6-6) before losing at home to the Colorado Mammoth (3-9). The Bandits currently sit tied for third in the division with

a 6-7 record, 2.5 games back of first and 1.5 back from a playoff birth.

With three games remaining, Buffalo is not out of it yet with the luxury of playing two games at home and all three against division opponents currently above Buffalo in the standings. Two of the teams, Orlando and Boston, the Bandits have already defeated on the road this season. It has already been a tough hole to climb

out of, but will it be too much for the Bandits to overcome in the end?

Forward John Tavares has led the resurgence since coming back from his lower leg injury earlier this season. His presence has sparked the offense with 33 points in seven games played. Mark Steenhuis has been leading the Bandits all season with 74 points, which places him third as of early April. Aside from Tavares and Steenhuis,

however, the forwards have lacked consistent scoring throughout the year.

Goaltending has been another problem for the Bandits this season. After releasing Ken Montour after a 0-4 start, rookie Angus Goodleaf has needed to step up but has so far been sub-par, posting a 1-3 record and a .785 goals against average. In the past month, Mike Thompson has been filling in nicely with a 3-0 record and a .803 save percentage. If the Bandits are to sneak into the playoffs they are going to

need Thompson to continue to be at his best and hope Tavares and Steenhuis can find someone on a game-by-game basis to step up and contribute to the scoring. The defense has been holding strong of late, allowing just 10.12 goals per game. If the Bandits are coming to make the playoffs they'll need to lock down as they play the top three teams in the division this month.

"It comes down to who runs their systems the best and that will give the chances away," defenseman

Billy D. Smith said.

"We are also just looking to take away time and space, and force the other team to make good plays and make them earn their chances," fellow linemate Chris Corbeil added.

So strap on your seat belts as the roller coaster ride is about to conclude with the Bandits getting closer and closer to the finish of the 2010 season. The only question is will they be in line for the playoff roller coaster or waiting in line until next year.

AFC East: Jets' recent drafts prove to be productive

By Charles Roberts

If ever there were a perfect example of improving your team through the NFL Draft, the New York Jets are it. Regardless of the front office changing hands, the last four years have produced Pro Bowl quality talent on both sides of the ball and can boast that they were a game away from the Super Bowl with a rookie quarterback.

Last season, despite only having three selections, the Jets managed to land what appears to be a franchise quarterback in Mark Sanchez and the heir-apparent to recently-released running back Thomas Jones in Shonn Greene. As if two solid starters in skill positions aren't enough, consider the three years that preceded that.

In 2006, the Jets solidified the offensive line into the foreseeable future with Pro Bowlers D'Brickshaw Ferguson and Nick Mangold, while 2007 produced arguably the league's best cornerback, Darrelle Revis, also a Pro Bowler. In 2008, the Jets spent the sixth overall pick on former Ohio State standout Vernon Gholston, who to date has been a letdown, but could still emerge as a star.

Also drafted during that time were starting tight end Dustin Keller, backup quarterback Kellen Clemens, starting linebacker David

Harris and the versatile wide receiver Brad Smith, who also returns kicks and punts and lines up as a Wildcat quarterback.

Other teams in the division should take notice.

The New England Patriots had four second-round and two third-round selections all essentially go to waste last season, while 2008's Defensive Rookie of the Year Jerod Mayo experienced a bit of a sophomore slump, perhaps a result of a nagging injury. The Patriots are getting the most out of their first-round pick from 2007, strong safety Brandon Meriweather, but beyond that, it's slim.

In 2006, the Patriots first and second-round selections were running back Laurence Maroney and wide receiver Chad Jackson, respectively. The team has continuously displayed their lack of faith in Maroney, while Jackson turned out to be a huge disappointment, as they moved up 13 spots to take the former Florida standout only to see him fall out of the league last year and recently sign with Buffalo.

The Miami Dolphins have had an interesting four years. In 2006 and 2007, their drafting was nothing short of dreadful. In 2006 they drafted



Photo by Jeff Barnes

The Dolphin's selection of Jake Long in the 2008 draft, along with classmate Chad Henne, has already proven to be a valuable combination.

a relatively pedestrian class with the likes of Jason Allen and Derek Hagan, while 2007 was one laughable pick after another. The Dolphins shocked the world by selecting undersized wide receiver Ted Ginn with the ninth overall pick and then again when they thought they landed their quarterback of the future in John Beck, who wasn't even good enough to make the team two years later.

Enter Bill Parcells in the Dolphins' front office and suddenly things starting making sense again in South Beach. The 2008 selections included left tackle Jake Long and the quarterback he protected in college, Chad

Henne. Long has since earned a trip to the Pro Bowl and Henne appears poised to lead the team into the future under center.

Last year, the Dolphins spent their first and second-round picks on cornerback Vontae Davis and quarterback Pat White. Davis was immediately thrust into the starting lineup, while White saw action in the Wild Cat formation.

The Buffalo Bills have had an interesting go when it comes to their draft picks. It seems as though they have either been mired in injury, controversy or just flat out didn't live up to expectations.

In 2006, the Bills spent two first-round choices on safety Donte Whitner and defensive tackle John McCargo. Whitner was seen by many as being a reach at eighth overall, while McCargo has been a bust in every sense of the

word.

A year later the Bills chose troubled California running back Marshawn Lynch at No. 12 in the first-round and so far that's been, well, trouble. That same year they brought in linebacker Paul Posluszny and quarterback Trent Edwards – both of whom have struggled with injuries and consistency.

Fast-forward to 2008 and the story is a relatively similar one. The Bills' first two selections were cornerback Leodis McKelvin and wide receiver James Hardy. McKelvin showed flashes of brilliance during his rookie campaign, but then opened up his sophomore season with a major gaffe on Monday Night Football in New England and was sidelined by a season-ending broken leg in Week 3. Hardy struggled with injuries and route running as a rookie and hardly hit the field after Terrell Owens came into town and strong-armed not only his jersey number, but also the chance of him seeing any action once he was

healthy.

Finally, in 2009 the Bills spent the 11th overall pick on defensive end Aaron Maybin, who, after a lengthy holdout didn't seem to be a fit for the Bills' 4-3 scheme. There was a lot to look forward to in guard Eric Wood, but as the story goes, he too went down with a nasty knee injury. Credit the Bills however with a job well done on safety Jairus Byrd, who seemingly could pick up the smell of a football like a shark on the trail of fresh blood.

It will be interesting to see how this year's draft turns out, as it's a class deep at offensive and defensive tackle. However, arguably the most intriguing storyline this year is where and when the former Heisman-winning, two-time national champion quarterback Tim Tebow will go. Allegedly both the Buffalo Bills and New England Patriots have shown interest. Might we see the division rivals battle in the second-round to land the much-discussed lefty?

Bills draft preview

Uncertainty over personnel decisions have mock drafts in turmoil

By Shawn Krest

The Buffalo Bills haven't made a big splash in the free agent market thus far this offseason. That means one of two things: Either they are going to rely heavily on the NFL Draft to fill their needs or they'll make some last minute moves that will throw fan and media draft boards into turmoil.

A quick game of musical chairs among NFL quarterbacks make it even tougher to predict which road Buffalo will take. The Eagles traded Donovan McNabb within their division, meaning that Oakland is still looking for a quarterback. It also means that former Washington quarterback Jason Campbell is available.

St. Louis looks ready to commit to Sam Bradford at the top spot, meaning that Marc Bulger is available.

If Buffalo pulls the trigger on either of those vets, or if they find a home and dislodge another incumbent that Buffalo snaps up, then quarterback will no longer be a need for the Bills heading into the draft.

If they pass on the vets, it means that they feel confident that Notre Dame quarterback Jimmy Clausen will fall to them at the ninth spot. The more teams that meet their quarterback needs early, the fewer that will be competing with the Bills for a shot at Clausen.

Or it could mean that the Bills are confident that Tim Tebow will still be available when the Bills pick in the second round. Jim Kelly's new best friend is expected to be the prize of the second round, and with a one-day break between rounds, the



Photo University of Iowa Athletics

Assuming that Jimmy Clausen is not available at the ninth spot, the Bills could address their need at tackle with Bryan Buluga from the University of Iowa.

phone lines will be burning up with trade offers at the top of round two.

Assuming that the Bills don't get Clausen at the ninth spot, what need are they likely to fill?

The Bills few free agent pickups filled needs at linebacker (Andra Davis), defensive tackle (Dwan Edwards), and offensive tackle (Cornell Green).

No offense to Green, but the Bills may decide that tackle is still their most glaring weakness, especially considering the talent that should be available to them at nine.

Trent Williams of Oklahoma, Bruce Campbell of Maryland, Bryan Buluga of Iowa and Anthony Davis of Rutgers are the top tackles in

the draft. At least one will be gone at the fifth position, but they can't all go before Buffalo picks.

Buluga seems to have replaced Williams as the trendy pick to go first, meaning that Buffalo would have a shot at the big Sooner tackle.

If Aaron Schobel makes good on his threat to retire, the Bills could be forced to go in a different direction. Defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul of South Florida could be available at nine. However, off-field problems could cause Carlos Dunlap to fall to them in the second round. The Florida Gators standout would have been one of the top ends in the draft, but a late season suspension has caused him to slide on most boards.

The Bills have been known to play their share of wild cards early in the draft. If they do it again, they may reach for nose tackle Dan Williams of Tennessee or grab a replacement for T.O. with Dez Bryant of Oklahoma State.

Our prediction is that Trent Williams will fall to the Bills at nine, and they will plug him into their offensive line for years to come.

Tebow will be gone by the time the Bills pick again, unless they manage to dangle Marshawn Lynch to move up in Round Two. Carlos Dunlap probably will be gone too. If so, Buffalo may decide to take Notre Dame wide receiver Golden Tate.

Of course, by the time you read this, Marc Bulger may be a Bill, Aaron Schobel could have decided to stay, and Lynch may already be dealt; all of which means that turmoil may be the only safe prediction for a mock draft.

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College baseball and softball hitting conference play

By Adam McGill

Baseball

Canisius College

The Golden Griffins started this season with a goal to win the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Championship and are the current favorites. They have outscored their first three opponents by a combined score of 45 to 28 and are just hitting their stride.

The majority of the team's starting lineup is hitting over .300, and there isn't an easy out on the roster. Senior Ian Choy is leading the team's offensive attack, and the outfielder has an on-base percentage of over 50 percent. Batting clean up for the Golden Griffins is Steve McQuail. The junior is known for his long home runs or close strikeouts.

On the mound, the Golden Griffins have had strong performances from every pitcher, including red-shirt junior Shane Davis. The Ontario native throws a vicious fastball, and he is one of the most well-conditioned athletes on the team. Filling out the rotation is senior Mike Goemans and red-shirt senior Andrew Van'tWout. The left-handed Goemans has pitched well this season, but he pitches his best as the weather gets warmer. Van'tWout has rebounded from a bad arm injury that cost him the majority of the 2008 season. With the two southpaws at the back end of the rotation, the Golden Griffins hold a distinct advantage over the predominantly right-handed batting conference.

Canisius is a hard-hitting team that is not afraid to run when given the chance. The team looks stronger than it has in years, and will be hard to contain as the season continues.

Niagara University

The Purple Eagles have had an up-and-down season so far. Easily one of the youngest teams in the MAAC, the Eagles have 10 freshmen.

Offensively, left fielder Matt Wietlispach, has led the charge for Niagara. The Chicago native has shown great power in his career, but also has been extremely dangerous when on the bases.

Wietlispach is amazingly on pace to have at least a 10-home run and 15-stolen base season. Niagara first basemen, Brian Deering, has also been playing strongly this season, hitting cleanup for the Purple Eagles. His ability to frustrate opposing pitchers is priceless.

Niagara's rotation has been very durable so far this season. Senior Bill Rafferty (Ogdensburg, N.Y.) has pitched very long into games, and he is currently boasting a WHIP under 2.00. Senior classmate, Daniel Morari, has also established himself as a premier strikeout pitcher. The team also has two freshmen rounding out the rotation, Kody Kasper and Tyler Scott (New Paltz, N.Y.). The young duo will be a major factor as the season progresses.

The team ends the month of April hosting a series against conference rivals, Marist and Fairfield.

University at Buffalo

Buffalo started the season slowly, but the team turned it around by winning 11 games in March. The Bulls tried to adjust to their 17 straight road games to open the season, but it seemed to take a toll on the team early. Since returning to Buffalo, the Bulls have settle down and gotten back to work.

The Bulls have a great hitting team this year, led by senior shortstop Brad Agustin (Williamsville). The Buffalo native has shown great power hitting to both fields, but also has been a formidable base stealer. First basemen Rob Lawler (Greece, N.Y.) has also added a spark for the Bulls offense. He has developed into the best power hitter on the team, and when he gets ahold of one the sound is unmistakable.

The Bulls have a much deeper rotation than in past seasons. Starting pitchers Pierre Miville-Deschenes and Chaz Mye (North Tonawanda) have really helped the Bulls stay competitive. Miville-Deschenes has been a fixture of the team's rotation, and he has shown great composure on the mound. Mye has been great as the second starter. The Buffalo native has been dominating



Photo by Paul Hokanson/UB

First baseman Rob Lawler has appeared Pujols-esque with his power-hitting for the Bulls.

innings this season, and he has an amazing strikeout to walk ratio. The Bulls have four solid pitchers in their rotation, and they are very dangerous with a healthy bullpen.

The Bulls have an important five game home stretch, from April 20 to 25. The team plays Canisius, Niagara, and then three straight games against conference rival Kent State.

Softball

Canisius College

Canisius has been very balanced this season. Winning nine of 11 games, including a six-game winning streak, the team's determination and performance this year could surprise people in the conference tournament.

Senior Michelle Fridey (Williamsville, N.Y.) leads the offensive attack, hitting almost .400 this year, and she is never an easy out. The catcher has an amazing eye at the plate, and she times her swing perfectly. Left fielder Lauren Hope has become the team's spark on offense, because her game changing speed can be a factor at any second.

Starting pitcher Amanda Baun has been a baseball-wielding sorceress this season. The freshman came in

and immediately made an impact for Canisius. In her first game starting, she struck out 12 players against Florida Gulf Coast. Her strikeout total is currently higher than her total number of innings pitched. Sophomore pitcher Caroline Main has improved on her control dramatically from last season. She has limited her walks, and she has put a little extra something at the tail end of her fastball.

The lady Griffins have a tough schedule to end April, playing conference powerhouses like Manhattan and Rider.

Niagara University

The Purple Eagles have a strong team top to bottom. Niagara has relied on the consistency of their seniors to teach and lead the incoming class. The Purple Eagles are staying competitive in each game; they just need more support in late inning out of the bullpen.

Niagara's batting order has been very strong this season. The team has six players that are currently hitting over .300, and every player on the roster is contributing. Second baseman Teresa Haley has been exceptional this year.

The Las Vegas native has continued her dominance of opposing pitchers, and she is living up to the title of Preseason MAAC Player of Year.

Junior Maggie McDonald

(Cicero, N.Y.) is having a strong season for the Bulls. Her mother Michelle is a breast cancer survivor, and on April 3 Niagara hosted a doubleheader called the 'Pitch for Pink.' Maggie's mom threw out the first pitch in the game to her daughter, and all of the proceeds were dedicated to finding a cure for breast cancer. The games ended in a split between the two teams, but the real victory was aiding in the advancement in breast cancer research.

Niagara has a small pitching rotation at this point in the season, but they have two pitchers who can go the distance in any game. Starting pitchers Julie DiMatteo and Cassie Stone (North Tonawanda, N.Y.) have pitched almost all of the team's innings. DiMatteo threw an important complete game shutout against conference rival Canisius earlier in the year. The duo has combined to pitch nine complete games, and when starters can go long into games, it helps keep the bullpen fresh.

The Purple Eagles have a big game at Saint Peters on April 17 and another big game at Manhattan on the 18.

University at Buffalo

In 2009, the Bulls set a record for the most wins in school history, with 25. The team is on pace to come close to beating that record again this season. The Bulls are led

by only four seniors, so many of the younger players are getting valuable experience. Buffalo has already beaten some very prestigious programs (Wisconsin, San Diego, Oakland, and Northern Texas), and the Bulls are playing well at the start conference play.

The team has relied on the strong hitting of Kristin Waldron (Windsor, N.Y.). The sophomore plays catcher and third base, while leading the Bulls in most offensive categories. Waldron is hitting over .300, and she has great patience when in the batters box. Freshman first baseman Jessica Griffin has been a great power hitter for the team this year. Griffin might not be hitting for average, but the bottom line is that baseball is won by runs.


The Bulls have one of the strongest pitchers in the conference with Sharon Barr. The senior is closing in on the school record of 638.1 innings pitched in a career (held by Stacey Evans from 2002-05). She will likely reach this mark by the end of the season, because she is one of the most durable pitchers to play in years. Barr has an ERA under 4.00, and she has pitched more than 60 percent of the team's total innings this season. Barr is playing like one of the best right now, and she is definitely setting the bar for the rest of the conference.

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Eagles soar high after impressive season

By Angela Stefano

It was a season with both a tough beginning and ending for the Niagara University men's hockey team.

A young team, including 10 freshmen, began the season on a six-game road trip that included games against three nationally ranked teams. They rallied at the end of the season, even beating No. 8 Bemidji State in the College Hockey America semi-finals, but lost the championship game to Alabama-Huntsville in overtime.

"It was the most aggressive non-league schedule we've played in 14 years," NU head coach Dave Burkholder said. "I didn't know or didn't forecast that we've have 10 freshman to start the year ... so I'm looking at it as a really young team that, after the initial road trip to start the season, played terrific."

Despite the rocky road, Burkholder was pleased with the season and, although the team will lose six seniors, is optimistic about the future.

"Going through what we went through this year is going to help us next year," Burkholder said. "It's a real exciting time for Niagara hockey."

A big rivalry - the Bemidji State semi-final game was huge, not just because it was a playoff game, but because of the rivalry between the two teams.

"Every year we have pivotal games against that team," senior defenseman Tyler Gotto said.

The Purple Eagles went 1-5 in the regular season against Bemidji State, so winning the game was huge - even bigger because the team was nationally-ranked.

"It ranks as one of the all-time biggest wins at Niagara," Burkholder said. "We got hot at the right time."

"With the struggles we'd had previously, it was great for our team to know we could do something like that," senior forward Chris Moran agreed.

The Purple Eagles' 12-20-4 record, though, doesn't properly reflect the team's talent. Thirteen players were named to the CHA All-Academic team, while goalies Adam Avramenko and Chris Noonan, and forwards Egor Mironov and Moran earned Player of the Week honors throughout the season. Moran was also named to the All-CHA First Team, while Gotto and senior forward Ryan Olidis were named to the All-CHA Second Team. Rookie defenseman Jason Beattie was named to the All-CHA Rookie Team as well.

"I owe it all to the coaches,"



Photo by NU Athletic Communications

Tyler Gotto's gritty play was recognized by his teammates with the Claw Award. He also took home All-CHA Second Team honors.

Moran said of his many honors. "It's pretty much a product of the system."

The team also hands out some awards of their own, including the team MVP award and the Claw Award, given to the player with the most "claws" throughout the season; it's a way of recognizing the gritty work of blocking shots and delivering hits - things that don't make the score sheets.

Moran and Gotto, respectively, were this year's winners.

"That's something I strive

for every year," Gotto said of the Claw Award. "Sometimes the media doesn't pick up on that aspect of the game, but it's a major aspect to winning the game."

The season was also rewarding for the younger players because of the experience gained and lessons learned.

"It's going to pay huge dividends for next year," Burkholder said.

Next season will bring a whole new field of opponents for the Purple Eagles, when NU moves from the CHA to Atlantic Hockey.

"We're really excited about the switch in leagues," Burkholder said, "and the rivalries that it's going to create, now that we're going to play Canisius when the games mean something, and RIT, and Mercyhurst, with their great tradition."

The close proximity of

Niagara to many of the other teams in the conference will make road trips and away games much easier as well.

"It's, for the most part, a bus league for us," Burkholder explained, "so in that regard, we're going to create some nice local rivalries and not be on the road as much, which is going to help our students."

The 2008-2009 season was the final season for the CHA. After two of the six teams in the league folded, a four-team league was no longer practical. Fellow CHA members Robert Morris will also be joining Atlantic Hockey, while Bemidji State will join the WCHA, and Alabama-Huntsville will remain an independent team.

"It'll be a big switch for the coaching staff and how they have to recruit players," Gotto said, "but they'll be a contender for the championships every year."

Niagara will be losing six seniors in May, including one

of the team's all-time leading scorers in Moran. "I'm so grateful for the opportunity to play close to home and play at the Division I level," Moran, a Buffalo native and Cardinal O'Hara graduate, said. "It's something I'll be grateful for the rest of my life."

Gotto, too, was thankful for the on- and off-ice lessons.

"I think it was the best choice I've made in my life so far," he said. "I got a great education at a great school, and I got to do something I love for four years."

Both Gotto and Moran said they will try and pursue a hockey career, either in a North American or European league, after graduation, but are prepared to look for a job using their degree eventually.

However, combining both their majors and their sport would be ideal.

"I'm hoping to stay close to hockey as long as I can," Gotto explained, "but if I can use my degree in the game of hockey, that'd be awesome."

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Nix and Gailey blunt with Bills Backers

By Ed Kilgore

We won't know if their approach works for a season or two or maybe longer, but new Bills general manager Buddy Nix and head coach Chan Gailey are taking a more blunt approach in terms of what they have to do to get the Bills to even approach the success of the early 90s. They say they could probably win more games right now by acquiring some veteran free agents, but other than the



quarterback position, they say doing that will only be a band-aid for the rebuilding job they have to do.

You won't hear Nix or Gailey use the term "rebuilding," but essentially, that's what they're doing.

Recently, Gailey and Nix talked to a group of about 450 Bills season ticket holders and premium-seat buyers about their philosophy, and then took a few questions, and it was entertaining to say the least.

Nix had the best one-liners, as he was introduced by former Bills special teams ace Steve Tasker at the Adam's Mark Hotel downtown as everybody, including a few of us lucky invited media free loaders, listened.

The new GM made it clear he and the rest of the Bills coaches and front office personnel can't, and won't, worry about hurting people's feelings or egos to upgrade the overall talent on the football team. "I get mine hurt everyday. I go home and complain, and my wife don't care."

Nix also said he is frequently asked about how long it will take to turn the Bills into a playoff contender again, and he said he didn't have a quick answer to that question.

"Don't tell me about the labor pains, tell me about the baby," he said. "That's what we've got to do."

We saw a side of Gailey we hadn't really seen, as he became almost fiery in telling the crowd of Bills loyalists how important they were to the success of the organization, and how great Bills fans are.

"I've been in that stadium when it was deafening, and I was on the other side, and it's no fun. One of my goals is to make it one of the toughest places to play in the NFL."

Gailey, as he has since arriving on the scene, would not go into specifics about the Bills quarterback situation, other than to say they are still looking to bring in another player or two at the position either through the draft or free agency or trade, but essentially, the position is wide open.

Both Nix and Gailey say the Bills personnel situation is not as bad as the perception, and most Bills fans can figure out what they need to do in terms of improving a team that has missed the playoffs the past 10 seasons. Gailey said, "If I took a poll, 90 percent of you would get it right ... it's not like it's a secret." But Gailey also told the crowd that the situation is better than he first thought it was, when all he heard was about "how the sky was falling. It's not. We've got some good players. We've got the nucleus to be a good football team."

Gailey said the switch to the 3-4 defense won't be as hard as many people think, because he believes the Bills have the players to make the switch effectively, adding it's really a hybrid 3-4 that won't always look the

same anyway.

One question from the crowd is often repeated in recent years, especially with 20 players going on injured reserve this past season. Can the Bills do something about the injuries? Gailey said the two people he brought in to work with strength and conditioning have had great success in that area, but he added sometimes "you need a little luck." He did say guard Eric Wood is expected to make a full recovery from his broken leg last season, and considered Wood a good example of several talented young players on the Bills roster right now.

One noticeable change Gailey made right away was in the Bills almost plush weight room, where he had several HD big-screen TVs on the walls taken down. Gailey says he wants a work environment in the Bills facilities, and this is just one of the ways he is sending that message.

Although nobody asked, Nix went out of his way to praise owner Ralph Wilson, who "wants to win more than anybody in this room." He said it won't be Wilson's fault if the Bills don't win, because that will fall on he and Gailey and the rest. Hey, no shock that Nix would praise Wilson, who gave a 71-year-old man another shot at a high profile NFL job, but it's also no surprise Wilson turned to Nix to help get his scouting staff and personnel staff back up to speed.

After listening to Nix and Gailey, once you get past the thick southern drawls that are not heard everyday in these parts, you get the feeling these are two no-nonsense guys who will "be on the same page," and based on the results of the past several seasons, that is a huge step towards writing a story that has a much happier ending.

Fantasy baseball from page 4

half (5.20 ERA). Expect both to return to their 2008 form, if not better, and jump on what should be a slightly discounted price in your league.

Others still on the rise: Ervin Santana LAA, Brett Anderson OAK, Scott Baker MIN, Tommy Hanson ATL, Ricky Nolasco FLA.

Pitchers returning from injuries almost always come at a fantasy discount, but that's because they're even more unpredictable than healthy pitchers. Oakland is calling Ben Sheets their ace after signing him to a one-year deal, but remember that this "ace" missed all of last year, hasn't pitched 200 innings since 2004, and has never won more than 13 games in a season. Brandon

Webb is most definitely an ace when healthy, but he hasn't pitched since Opening Day of last year, yet inexplicably waited until August before finally having a "clean-up" surgery procedure. If you can get him cheaply, take a shot, but don't overpay for a guy who'll start the year on the DL.

Unless every scout in the world is wrong, Stephen Strasburg's video game-esque college stats weren't a fluke. He had a strong showing in spring training before being sent to the minors for more seasoning, but the starving Nationals faithful will ensure he won't be there long. He'll help fantasy teams this year in K's, but it's reasonable to expect

the usual growing pains that young pitchers encounter upon being thrust under the bright lights. If you play in a keeper league, his already-inflated price is only going to keep rising, so move all-in now, or resign yourself to him being virtually untouchable for the foreseeable future. How bad do you want him?

If you simply must draft a relatively unproven player this year, you might be better served by tabbing Baltimore's Brian Matusz. While his raw stuff is not as impressive as Strasburg's, Matusz's eight starts with the O's last year showed he's already major-league ready. Just keep in mind the standard AL East caveats.

Local boxing happenings

By Bob Caico

Roy Brash of the Lackawanna Community Boxing Club hosted a 14-bout amateur card at Castricone's Fighting Arts Center in Depew. Dante Palmer from the host club and Demetrious Lengo of Roc Boxing put on a thrilling three-round contest that was voted fight of the night. Palmer scored a standing eight count on Lengo but Demetrious came back to drop Palmer in the same round. The fight was close but unanimous as Palmer came away with a 5-0 decision.



Dante Palmer (left) of the Lackawanna Boxing Club and Demetrious Lengo of Roc Boxing show off their "Fight of the Night trophies."

- Roberto Diaz (Roc) rsc-2
- Noah Ray (Victory) rsc-2
- Kieshawn Stone (Roc. St. Martins) dec 5-0
- Shaquan McCauliff (Syracuse) dec 5-0
- David Geary (Victory) rsc-2
- Orlando Zayas (Roc) dec 3-2
- Luis Berrio (Northwest CC) dec 3-2
- Santino Castricone (Castricone's) dec 4-1
- Santino Castricone (Castricone's) dec 4-1
- Jerome Costner (Bomb Squad) dec 5-0
- Brendon Zanoni (Lackawanna) rsc-2
- James Morrow (Castricone's) rsc-2
- Walter Williams (Bomb Squad) dec 3-2

- Jose Rodriguez (Lackawanna) rsc-2
- Pat Thompson (Bflo. Northwest CC) rsc-2
- Andy Rice (Roc Boxing) dec 5-0
- John Snyder (Thunder Boxing) rsc-3
- Roberto DeLeon (Northwest CC) rsc-3
- Paul Jackson (Victory) dec 4-1
- Erick Lumeri (Lockport) dec 4-1
- Akowa Kinsey (U.B.) dec 3-2
- Pedro Rivera (Syracuse) dec 3-2
- Luis Berrio (Northwest CC) dec 5-0
- Corey Webster (Northwest CC)

A large crowd was on hand at the Flickinger Center on March 20 for the preliminaries of the New York State Golden Gloves. Two rings held a total of 30 fights with

boxers from the western district. The semifinals were held on April 9 and the Finals will be on April 20, both at the Flickinger Center in downtown Buffalo.

Felix Mercedes of Buffalo improved to 5-0 as a professional when he won a unanimous decision over Ivan Flores of Mexico. The six-round fight was held at Casino Rama on March 27. Felix won easy by scores of 59-55 twice and 59-54.

Guillermo Sanchez was involved in a no contest (ruled a technical draw in Puerto Rico) on March 26 in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. Both fighters suffered cuts and the bout was stopped in the third round. Sanchez (11-0) has an ESPN2 date scheduled for May 14 against Dominic Salcido (17-2) in Primm, Nev.

Vincent Arroyo (9-1) of Amherst returns to action on the undercard of Kelly Pavlik-Sergio Martinez fight at the Boardwalk in Atlantic City on April 17. Vincent goes against Jeremy Bryan of Paterson, N.J., who has a 13-0 record.

Anthony Lenk, formerly of Niagara Falls, won by third round TKO on April 10th to improve to 7-1 at the Hard Rock in Las Vegas.

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U.S. ARMY ARMY STRONG

Doctari's Fishing Forum

with Rich Davenport

April fishing harkens spring

April's start brought unseasonably warm weather and fast action in area waterways, a sure sign the spring angling season is well underway. With a great ice-fishing season now officially in the books, anglers across WNY get out the open water gear and hit the streams, ponds and lakes in search of fish on the spring feed.

Great Lakes Trout

Lake Ontario trout seekers capitalize on the Lake Erie ice melt happening in the lake this year, as the normal ice floes found rushing over the Falls post-ice boom removal did not materialize this year, leaving boaters with navigable lower Niagara River waters at the peak of the spring runs. Rainbow and brown trout dominate the take for drifters working Devil's Hole and the Lewiston drift. Egg presentations bounced along the bottom near the 20-foot break line gets fish early, but the afternoon bite may be better, as waters warm during daylight hours triggering action.



Photo courtesy Rich Davenport

Collins angler Dane Stocker shows off this fine spring-running steelhead caught from Eighteen Mile Creek this past March. Fish are running!

Boaters from Wilson to Oak Orchard work near-shore waters with stick baits trolled near 3 MPH on flat lines, or off side planers for shallow feeding trout gearing up to run into the streams. Brown trout dominate the take, but hefty steelhead mix in. Get out early for the hottest bite.

Lake Erie streams show incredible runs of rainbow trout up to and exceeding the 10-pound mark. Eggs bounced along the bottom or worked through deeper pools and runs under a float deliver action for those

working the mighty Cattaraugus, right up to the Scoby Hill dam. Eighteen Mile Creek shows impressive runs in both the main and south branch, with action seeming to pick up as the day wears on. Low precipitation in early April could hamper runs as waters lower and warm, but a couple good rains could sustain the runs through the end of April. Do

not overlook a night crawler presentation, as the rains and thawed ground have worms washing into the stream.

Dunkirk area anglers are delighted to see the Harry Probst Memorial fishing platform now fully repaired (thanks to Habitat / Access funds) and open for fishing in the west end of the harbor, out front of the NRG warm-water discharge. A minnow under a float is all one needs to get into hot trout action, but casting spoons could outperform bait as trout slash violently at bait.

Inland Trout

Most inland streams, lakes and ponds received their annual stocking of yearling and two-year-old browns, brookies and limited rainbow trout just in time for the April 1 opener. The Genesee River, near Wellsville, offers some tremendous trout fishing for all ages, as little more than a small silver Panther Martin cast quartering upstream draws trout from hiding and into action. Oppenheim Park in Niagara County received fresh stocking for the spring season, and is a great place to introduce kids to trout fishing, as easy shore access and willing fish offer a few good hours of diversion and family time.

Panfish

Crappie runs have begun on Chautauqua Lake, especially in the south basin, where ice cover disappeared first, allowing waters to warm up to desired levels for the crappie spawn. Minnows under a float, or small spinner baits slow-rolled along the bottom produce fish while weeds are down. Concentrate efforts near Burtis Bay and Ashville Bay until waters across the lake

warm a bit more.

Barge canal springtime crappie haunts start showing numbers, and anglers need little more than a canoe or kayak to position out front of fallen trees and other structure near deep water to pull slabs gearing up to spawn. Areas near Ellicott Creek Park in Tonawanda also deliver, especially for shore-bound anglers.

Dates to Remember

April 17, Springville Strutters Jake Day, youth hunting/ fishing clinics from 8 a.m. - 3 p.m.. For more info, contact Brian Smith, (716) 532-2159, or Chris Stetler at (716) 946-1954.

April 25 is the Crow's Nest Fishing Club's Fund-raising Kroelick's Chicken BBQ, from noon until 5 P.M. Funds benefit their kids' fishing programs. Join them at the Crow's Nest, on the corner of Campbell Blvd. and Dodge, N. Amherst, NY.

April 25 marks the Bison City Rod & Gun "Teach Me to Fish" event. For more info, contact Dave Barus at (716) 597-4081.

April 28-29, lower Niagara Steelhead Challenge to benefit Cystic Fibrosis. Interested

anglers call (716) 204-2535 for more info.

April 30 - May 9, LOC Spring Trout & Salmon Derby, \$12,500.00 Grand Prize! Visit www.loc.org for more info.

Saturday, May 1, marks the opening of Walleye, Northern Pike and Lake Erie trophy bass openers for NY anglers.

May 23, Letchworth State Park Trout Pond Derby, 10 a.m. - 4 a.m. Contact George Dovolos at (585) 493-3600 for more info.

Remember, take a kid fishing, and give the gift that lasts a lifetime.

Rich Davenport is co-founder of WeLoveOutdoors.com, an avid outdoorsman and member of the NYSOWA. His works are published in *NY Outdoor News*, *Walleye.com* and the *Buffalo News*. Rich is also the recording secretary for the *Erie County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs*, secretary of the *Western New York Environmental Federation*, member of the *Erie County Fisheries Advisory Board* and is the *Region 9 Rep NYSCC Big Game Committee*. E-mail him at rich@weloveoutdoors.com.

Young trainers living their dreams at Raceway

By Robert Salzman

It can be a tough way to make a living, with long hours, (uncertain income), profit-driven bosses and demanding four-legged employees.

Sound like the ideal job description? Well, it does to Shawn McDonough and Stacy Keene, two of the new standardbred racehorse trainers who are beginning their careers at Buffalo Raceway.

"There is nothing else I would rather do," McDonough, who at age 19 is the youngest trainer on the Western New York harness racing circuit, stated. "I love the racing business. I love being around the horses and I love the competition, watching your horses race and knowing that you have played a role in their success."

"If I wasn't a trainer, I'd probably still be doing something with the horses because I love being around the animals," Keene noted. "There was a time when I thought about being a veterinarian but there are some awfully tough parts of that job I don't think I could handle."

Saying that training racehorses is in their blood might be an understatement.

McDonough's "right-hand man," as he calls him, is his father, Mark McDonough, a long-time trainer. Shawn credits his father with teaching him the business from the bottom up. While watching his father guide the racing careers of many horses, Shawn began his chosen career path around the age of



Photo by Bob Salzman

Shawn McDonough shows off Keystone Manuel, a 9-year-old trotter he says is one of the hardest working horses in his barn.

12 by jogging some of his father's equine athletes.

These days, it is father helping son as the McDonoughs have about 10 horses in training at the Alden farm and training center of Dave Krol, who owns some of the horses Shawn is training. The facility has a modern barn, spacious paddocks and a 5/8 mile training track with an outstanding surface.

The younger McDonough is also in the process of acquiring his racing driver's license.

Keene, meanwhile, is smack dab in the middle of a racing family of her own. Her dad, Jerry, has been a trainer for many years and Stacy remembers hanging around his barn as early as age four. She wound up working for her father before going to work for another very successful trainer, John Cummings Sr., who recently retired with Stacy taking over his 10-horse operation.

Stacy's brother Cliff is also a standardbred trainer.

"My father gave both Cliff and I a real appreciation for



Photo by Bob Salzman

Stacy Keene is accompanied by the star of her barn, open pacer Arm And A Leg, who gave Keene her first win as a trainer.

horses and we've just kind of taken it from there," she said. "People always ask but there's really no sibling rivalry between Cliff and I because we both want to see each other do well and make a living."

Keene understands that training the horses is a great responsibility, both to the owners who buy the horses and put them in her care and the animals themselves, whose well-being is literally in her hands.

"We have some owners who have been around the business a long time and they know that there are ups and downs involved," Keene said, "but they have confidence in me that the horses are well taken care of and that we are doing our best to make their investment pay off."

"I have some outstanding owners," McDonough, who counts his brother David Bratt, Mark Jakubik and, of course, Krol, among his owners, added. "You have to have a very strong, honest relationship with them because without the owners, you don't

have any horses to train."

Ironically, Jakubik also owns horses trained by Keene.

Trainers are traditionally paid a day-rate for each horse to provide for its needs with a small profit included.

They also receive five percent of whatever purse money their horses earn, meaning that the bottom line is directly tied to performance.

Both take exceptional care of their stock, using high-quality feeds and taking a very hands-on approach to their

charges.

"We are very big into keeping the horses hydrated and well-fed," McDonough explained. "If you aren't willing to put quality in, you're not going to get quality out."

Keene points out that each horse has a unique personality. The top star of her barn, open pacer Arm And A Leg, who has earned over \$80,000 each of the past two seasons, knows he is the king of her stable. He kicks and squeals when he isn't the first horse to be fed or head to the track for training in the morning.

Fittingly, Keene's first win as a trainer came in her first race as a conditioner and it was with Arm And A Leg on Feb. 20 at Buffalo Raceway.

McDonough's biggest win to date came in the final of the Raceway's Niatross

"Knockout" Series when Wine Guide closed from well off the pace to capture the \$26,000 event in late February.

McDonough's first win as a trainer came on Feb. 13 when TM Mohawk scored for owner Krol after McDonough had claimed the horse the week before.

"When I'm looking for horses, I like ones with a lot of back class," he stated, "horses who have been good earners in the past who know their way to the winner's circle. If you can keep them sound, you can make some money."

With their love of horses and dedication to the sport, McDonough and Keene are safe bets to enjoy continued success in their new careers.

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Pro wrestling news and notes (Please don't bring any chairs...)

By Ivan the Impaler

So many topics, so little time, space and money...

Last month, WWE quietly announced that it was banning chairshots to the head. Some wrestling fans may be initially disappointed to hear this. Then again, it's not their heads that were getting bashed in.

All sports, from football to hockey, now acknowledge the dangers of repeat concussions. Most importantly, the players themselves have become aware of the long-term dangers to their health. Cynics say that leagues and their doctors have long been aware of the potential risks, but kept silent so as not to interfere with the "entertainment (economic) value" of their investment.

Let's face it- a concussion is a bruise to the brain. While some may question the fol-

lowing statement in my case, it can be argued that the brain is the most important part of the anatomy.

Hopefully, this serves as a wake-up call to many independent wrestlers who felt for years that taking chairshots to the head would make them look "hardcore" and get a try-out with the WWE, or, in the past, ECW or CZW. Well, like it or not, ECW isn't around anymore, WWE has banned chairshots, and getting work with CZW doesn't eliminate the need to get a day job to pay for food and beer.

Turn the clock back about 12 years. There were many young wrestlers, some trained and some not, who made being a wrestler secondary to the perceived need to be a human crash test dummy. Getting hit in the head with a folding chair in front of 63

people for gas money seemed like a form of career-advancement at the time.

And what did it get them? I won't name names (at least until the book comes out), but there are some local guys who, at least subtly, took that approach to our great sport. Guess what? Not one of them landed a contract with WWE, ECW, ROH, etc etc due to being able to "take" chairshots. Now they're older, slower, and no wealthier to show for it. Ah, but they do have YouTube clips to show their grandkids there was a time when gramps was able to go shopping by himself and didn't pee in his pants all day.

I'm not a fan of all the changes WWE made to their product over the last few years; the genre itself has been watered down to appease cor-

porate sponsors (or the lack thereof). This, however, is a step in the right direction. There will certainly be some selective allowance of chairshots in high-profile angles or PPVs, but for now, they are dead, like the many brain cells they have killed over the years.

LOCAL WRESTLING CHAMPIONS (As of April 7, 2010)

Here are some local guys who do know how to work; otherwise, they wouldn't be holding Championship Gold!

BUFFALO CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING (Buffalo/Lackawanna, N.Y.)

-NIAGARA FRONTIER HEAVYWEIGHT: Ron Falco

-TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: Troy Buchanan & Rex Atkins (The T-Rex Express)

EMPIRE STATE WRESTLING (Wheatfield/North Tonawanda, N.Y.)

-HEAVYWEIGHT: Kevin Grace

-TAG TEAM: Mike Radski & Brandon Thurston

INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING FEDERATION (Niagara Falls, N.Y.)

-CHAMPION: Pepper Parks

NWA NY (Rochester, N.Y.)

-HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: Gabe Saint

-NO LIMITS TITLE: Spazz

-TAG TEAM: Hellcat & Triple X

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, April 3 - NWA NY - The German House, 315 Gregory St. - Rochester, N.Y. - 6 p.m. Bell time. - See www.nwaupstate.net for details

Saturday, April 10 - Empire State Wrestling - St. Johnsbury Fire Hall - Wheatfield, N.Y. - 6 p.m.

Saturday, May 1 - Buffalo Championship Wrestling - Lake Erie Italian Club- South Park Avenue. - Lackawanna, N.Y. - 7 p.m. bell time. For info, contact troybuchanan@yahoo.com. Scheduled to appear: Steve Corino, Danny Doring, Pepper Parks and Chet "The Jet" Jablonski.

Saturday, May 8 - Ragin' Wolf - Mixed Martial Arts - Seneca Niagara Casino - 7 p.m. -see www.ragingwolf.com.

Saturday, May 8 - Dragon Gate USA Wrestling - Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

Tuesday, May 11 - WWE Smackdown (TV Taping) - HSBC Arena, Buffalo, N.Y. - 7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 17- WWE Monday Night Raw - Air Canada Centre -Toronto, Ontario-7:45 p.m.

Saturday, May 22 - IWF (International Wrestling Federation) -The Meeting Place -2469 Niagara Road - Niagara Falls, N.Y. - 6:30 p.m. start.

Saturday, June 26 - NWA

NY - All Star Sports Arena - 557 East Ridge Road - Irondequoit, N.Y. - 6 p.m. bell time. Scheduled to appear: Former ECW Champ Tommy Dreamer!

TELEVISION

The Finest Wrestling Program in WNY History is Wrestling/No Limits TV, featuring the best wrestlers from Buffalo, Rochester, Southern Ontario and beyond! You can watch the action, courtesy of Big Guy Productions, in Rochester at 3 p.m. Sundays on My18 (WBGT-TV). In Suburban Erie County, it's on Time-Warner Cable Channel 20 every Saturday at 4 p.m., with replays Mondays at 11:30 p.m.

RADIO

Listen to The Pain Clinic, heard at Saturdays at 10 a.m. on WHTK (Hot Talk 1280) in Rochester. Cashman Rich Jones and his Staff have all your wrestling news and commentary, along with special guests. Not in Rochester? You can listen online at www.feelthepain.net.

INTERNET

One of the best new websites in Cyberspace is www.ringsidedigest.com, covering wrestling, boxing and MMA.

It features original content with some local twists. Visit it at least 5 times per day!

For Mike Brown, fighting is fun... ...and it's better than a day job

By Ivan Godzuk

Since going to high school in Maine, Mike Brown has always been wrestling or cage fighting.

The former World Extreme Cagefighting (WEC) Featherweight champion loves what he's doing, and is in no hurry to "retire" to the 9-to-5 world, even though he went to college.

So Mike, if you couldn't fight for a living, what would you be doing?

He laughs and says "I don't know, man. I was a biology major in college, so I'd probably be working in a lab growing bacteria in a dish."

In the meantime, cultivation of bacteria will have to take a backseat to beating up humans.

Mike was in town for the last Raging Wolf MMA event; he'll be fighting live at the first-ever WEC pay-per-view event on April 24. He faces Manny Gamburyan; a win almost assuredly gives Brown a shot to recapture the Featherweight Title (145#) against the winner of the Jose Aldo-Uriah Faber contest the same evening.

Mike wrestled at Norwich University, a Division III school in Vermont. (Ironically, he competed several times at the Northeastern Regionals at Brockport State.). But once he came across mixed martial arts, he knew where he was headed. "I was a fan the first time I saw it; I was in love with the sport and wanted to try it," he recalls. "One fight led to another and another. I never got a real job (laughs); I just kept plugging away."

Like many other collegiate grapplers, Mike was frustrated by the absence of a real professional freestyle wrestling tour, and turned to MMA. "Wrestling is a lot of wear and tear on the body. It's hard to make a living if you're just a wrestler; there's the national championship, and that's about it. (Regardless), I think fighting's a much cooler sport; I'm much more in love with the sport of fighting."

Brown trains with American Top Team in South Florida. "It's an amazing gym. We have 84 fighters and they have someone ranked in the Top 10 in every weight class." Mike is also an aspiring trainer; he was in the corner of welterweight Luigi Firavanti at the last Raging Wolf event, as Luigi convincingly beat Shane Primm by unanimous decision.

After building his MMA record to 19-4, Mike got a title shot against mega-popular Uriah Faber at WEC 36 on Nov. 5, 2008 in Florida. Brown won the belt with a first-round flurry of fists that rendered Faber unable to defend himself. His initial title defense was a first-round win over Leonard Garcia via tapout, which led to the highly anticipated rematch against Faber.

The June 7, 2009 battle was in Uriah's backyard of Sacramento, Calif. at WEC 41. The crowd (not surprisingly) was incredibly pro-Faber; did that bother Brown? No, he said. "You just block it all out, actually it gets me more fired up; it

makes you want to fight even harder. The only time it matters is when you've got a close fight; you don't want the judges to be swayed by (the crowd)."

The contest was memorable not just for the atmosphere or because it was darn good fight, but because Faber broke his right hand in the very early going. Brown and his cornermen realized there was damage "later on (in the fight), probably in the third or fourth round, I figured out that he was hurt. But it's hard to stop (defending against right-handed strikes), because sometimes he was still hitting me. So you're not sure exactly. You know something is wrong, but you didn't know exactly what it is." Brown went on to stop Uriah, and retained the title via unanimous decision.

His championship reign ended with a second-round loss to Jose Aldo on Nov. 18, 2009, but Mike climbed right back on the horse and beat Anthony "Cheesesteak" Morrison in 1:57 on Jan. 10, 2010.

A couple of takedowns, a rear-naked choke, and Brown was back in the title hunt.

With his record now at 23-5, Mike controls his own destiny. He's a win away from either a chance to extract revenge from Aldo or a third-fight against Faber. 2010 is certain to be an exciting year for Mike Brown.

Whatever the outcome, it'll be more entertaining (and profitable) than watching bacteria grow.

Trivia quiz

By Mike Fox

Since 1948, the NCAA has conducted a yearly 16-team single-elimination tournament to determine the men's Division I collegiate champion. This month, we pay homage to some of the players that have excelled during these tourneys, including a couple who found their way to the Buffalo Sabres.

1. Only three schools have made 30 or more appearances in the tournament since 1948: Michigan, Minnesota, and who?

- a. Boston College
- b. Clarkson
- c. Boston University
- d. North Dakota

2. Four players have scored seven goals in one tournament year. Who was the most recent?

- a. Shawn Heaphy, Michigan State, 1989
- b. Tony Amonte, Boston University, 1990
- c. Gabe Gauthier, Denver, 2005
- d. Nathan Gerbe, Boston College, 2008

3. Who holds the record for most career tournament shutouts, with three?

- a. Jordan Parise, North Dakota
- b. Marty Turco, Michigan
- c. Cory Schneider, Boston College
- d. Eddie Belfour, North Dakota



Photo by Joe Valenti

Nathan Gerbe starred while at Boston College, but did he ever score 7 goals in one tournament year?

4. What school holds the record for most consecutive Frozen Four appearances, with 10?

- a. Michigan
- b. Michigan Tech
- c. Cornell
- d. Colorado State

5. Only 12 shutouts have posted in Frozen Four games. Two goaltenders have done it twice in their careers, Karl Goehring and who?

- a. Ken Dryden, Cornell
- b. Marty Turco, Michigan
- c. Ron Grahame, Denver
- d. Terry Kleisinger, Wisconsin

6. Two players share the record for most points scored in a single tournament year, with 13. One was Aaron Broten in 1981, the year he was the first winner of the Hobey Baker Award. Who was the other?

- a. Tony Amonte, Boston U., 1990
- b. Shawn McEachern, Boston U., 1990

c. Chris Drury, Boston U., 1998

d. Gabe Gauthier, Denver, 2005

7. Only two players have scored five goals in one tournament game. The first was Colorado College's Carl Lawrence against Boston College in 1950. Who was the other?

- a. Kevin Porter, Michigan, 2008
- b. Chris Higgins, Boston University, 2006
- c. Doug Smail, N. Dakota, 1980
- d. Gil Buford, Michigan, 1950

8. Who holds the career record for most points in tournament games?

- a. Brendan Morrison, Michigan
- b. Lane MacDonald, Harvard
- c. Paul Kariya, Maine
- d. Jim Dowd, Lake Superior State

9. Who holds the record for most saves in one tournament game, with 77 in a 4OT game?

- a. Brian Hayward, Cornell, 1981
- b. Chris Terreri, Providence, 1985
- c. Derek Gustafson, St. Lawrence, 2000
- d. Rick DiPietro, Boston University, 2000

10. Only two goaltenders have won a Hobey Baker Award, Ryan Miller and who?

- a. Scott Clemmensen
- b. Robb Stauber
- c. Chris Terreri
- d. Marty Turco

Answers: 1. c 2. d 3. c 4. a 5. b 6. a 7. d 8. Also against Boston College 9. d 10. b

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