



This is the second in a series of stories for The News by the oldest daughter of Bills great Jim Kelly.

A slight chill went up my back as I trembled beneath the cool mid-October breeze. Reluctantly, I zipped my coat over my Buffalo Bills jersey – covering the No. 12 I wore so proudly. It was Sunday morning and the Bills were facing a marquee rivalry against the Miami Dolphins.

Of course we already had staked out our usual tailgating turf outside Ralph Wilson Stadium. We were (and still are) territorial about tailgating. It was (and is) a distinctive rite of passage for all of us who carry the Kelly name.

It was a perfect football Sunday, tailgating at its best: family, friends, brew for the adults, grilled dogs, and grilled Dolphins. But the highlight at this particular game was my high school boyfriend; this was the first time I had brought him to a game. And in the Kelly family, coming to a Bills game was (and is) a big deal.

From the moment we stepped out of the car I never stopped introducing him. And it didn't take long before No. 34, Thurman Thomas, and No. 83, Andre Reed, were running their favorite patterns to check out who the quarterback's daughter was dating. They've always been very protective of me, so when it comes to boys, you can imagine how tough they are.

I will never forget when Andre firmly shook my boyfriend's hand, looked him in the eye and said, "Nice to meet you. You better take care of her – otherwise, I'm coming after you!" Though we all laughed it off in that moment, it was clear that Andre meant what he said and would do anything to protect me.

But isn't that the typical response? You read the play and react. If there's a blitz, you pick it up. If there's a fumble you dive on the ball; should there be an interception, you tackle the guy. And when it comes to the people and things you love and treasure, you move to protect them if you sense a potential threat. You do something about it.

These are things that come to mind when I ponder what it means to be a Bills fan. We don't need a playbook to fight for our team or protect and defend who we are. When someone comes along to snicker at the idea of four straight Super Bowl losses, the claws come out as we "sharply point out" what they just said: **FOUR STRAIGHT SUPER BOWLS.**

As Bills fans, we not only take pride in our past, and glory in the Glory Days, we move the ball forward with a relentless hope for the future. Being a Bills fan means we bleed red, white, and blue, sing the "Shout!" song until our voices run dry, and tailgate until they make us leave.

It means that we proudly wear jerseys of our favorite players past and present (I'm just a bit partial to No. 12). We paint our faces and cheer through games in weather so frigid we stick to the seats. Our teeth chatter as we cheer, knowing that even the hottest chicken wings wouldn't warm us up but we're still counting on our team to make the play that wins the game.

Being a Bills fan is more than that, however. When the win seems completely out of reach, when the opponents tease us that we haven't been to the playoffs in 14 years, when they mock our draft picks and don't believe in our organization, when it's third and long and nothing seems to be working – the true Bills fan will always protect and defend, no matter what.

Because the measure of a man in a Bills uniform is found beyond the scoreboard regardless of how bad we want the win or how hard we tried to get it. And a true fan will stand for his team, because of what his team stands for – no matter what the cost. And that impenetrable loyalty is what separates fans from a Buffalo Bills fan.

To share your views on what it means to be a Bills fan, email kellyfanjournal@gmail.com.