



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

I've asked you to share what it means to be a Bills fan, and to say I'm overwhelmed by your responses would be a drastic understatement. As I read your replies, it not only confirmed my own ideas of what a Bills fan is, but you have given me a new perspective on the fan-family. I can feel the fervor in your words, your spirited devotion abounding with unique stories that have not only chronicled the shaping of your fan-hood, but in some cases, charted the course of your lives.

As a young girl, I was thrilled to see my dad jump in the air cheering as he watched the Bills take it in for a touchdown; or seeing him yelling at the TV in frustration and calling out plays that would have countered the interception or fumble we just saw. At "The Ralph," I would (and still do) cling to my dad's hand as we walked around the field while the players warmed up, in awe of how monstrous they look up close.

I could go on describing all the moments and how they have helped to create this die-hard fan. But I'd much rather share some of your feedback. Thanks for sharing and enjoy!

Email responses:

- "I have to say that being a Bills fan is different than being a fan of every other team and every other sport. A true blue (and red) Bills fan not only cheers for the Bills, but they actually live Bills football. My wife and I were 25-year season-ticket holders. Typical days for us during those 25 years was living, eating, breathing Bills football. That included: having a hard time sleeping the night before games, going on the Buffalo Bills message board for the latest news and rumors, organizing tailgates for home games and having home parties for away games, decorating my house and TV room in Bills memorabilia, getting extra tickets for people that needed them, going to an occasional away game, and basically placing my entire life around Bills football." – Dan and Christine Wild.

"I became a Bills Fan on Thanksgiving Day 1964 when Pete Gogolak kicked a 33-yard field goal with 3 seconds left to beat the San Diego Chargers, 27-24, in San Diego. I was at my cousin's house on Ashland Ave. in Buffalo watching the game on a little black and white TV in the attic so we could get better reception. I was 10 years old. I have been a die-hard fan ever since. So keep the Bills where they belong in Buffalo so I can visit, have a beef on weck, some Buffalo wings, and a Genny!" – Michael Hinman.

- "In a typical family, you have your parents, your spouse, your children. You love each of them unconditionally, would do anything for them, and not only look forward to spending time with them but actually cherish that time. To many WNY families, the Bills are just one extra member. You can't imagine life without them, and no matter what trials they might put you through, you wouldn't trade them for anything else." – Del Reid.

- “Everything! That’s what it means. People here bleed red, white and blue. The outcome of a Bills win or loss dictates what the rest of the week will look like. Once you’re a Bills fan, you’re one for life. When the game is on, everything else is on hold.” – Dave Arnts.

- I’m 61 and have been a Bills fan for as long as I can remember, back to the days of Jack Kemp, and attending games at the old Rockpile. Victories are awesome, but what is most important to me is having a team that we are proud of. The character and community contributions of the players mean so much. For the most part, we have been able to be proud of the kind of people who do far more than entertain us on the field, but also represent us and this city.” – Cliff Miller.

- “I’ve been a Bills fan for four decades. To me it’s a connection to my old home town, a connection with our families who still live there. It’s a naive belief that one day if the Bills win a Super Bowl, it will be the catalyst for great things for the area. When the Bills win, even as a person in his 50s, it makes me happy. I love seeing the fans at home games enjoying themselves and making noise. Buffalo without the Bills is unfathomable, although I know it is a possibility. I truly hope that never happens in my lifetime because I would be heartbroken.” – Adam.

- “What does it mean for me to be and have been a Bills football fan? Everything. I first became a fan somewhere around the very early 1960s and am still going strong.” – Eileen Callahan.

“I am a Bills fan, win or lose. I plan every week for my Sundays. I turn on the TV at 12:30 and listen to the football games as I do housework. I cook and bake to the games. When the Bills are on, I sit with my kids and watch with munchies and a drink. My Sundays are my days. I work six days a week and enjoy that day off at home with the NFL. I started watching games when I moved in with my father at age 15, Aug. 25, 1990! Oh my, those were the days. Your father with the no-huddle offense. Bruce Smith; that man could move! Andre Reed, Thurman Thomas, Marv Levy. Yep, because of my father’s passion every Sunday and your father and his teammates, I am and will always be a Bills fan. – Kirstin Knowles.

- “A Bills fan is many things with many emotions. When a Bills fan is asked, ‘Wouldn’t you prefer to not go to four Super Bowls that you lost?’ she replies: ‘There is no feeling that compares to winning that game before the Super Bowl and then cheering and partying and preparing for that big game. It is not just the team at that game; it is each and every one of us.’ The anxiousness, the excitement, the knowing you are going to win, the getting upset when we don’t but loving the team afterward because we were there and we tried and we love our team.” – Connie Cunliffe.

- “My family and I have always been and always will be die-hard Bills fans. We sat through wind, rain, cold and snow and cheered our hearts out. I no longer live in WNY, but I always stop everything to watch the Bills in action every Sunday, cheering loudly and proudly. I end up shutting my windows from yelling so loud. Don’t want the neighbors to complain. I wear my Bills shirts with pride. When those nasty Giants fans I work with start pushing me around about my Bills, I rise above that and just tell them that if they go 0 and 16 this season, I will still remain loyal.” – Tari Dobmeier.

Twitter responses:

- “Loyal, that is all, just loyal.”
  - “I’m a fan b/c of the men of character who have played and stayed in Buffalo. The fans are loyal to a fault, and we’re due.” @Dbright21
  - “Pride, a close knit family. Honestly the best feeling in the world being a fan of the Buffalo Bills.” @Naw JF
  - “Undying faith. Loyalty. Pride in a storied past. The knowledge that things will get better. Family. #BillsMafia.”
  - It means all the good things: Family, Love, Hope, Support, America, LIFE!!! #PrayersForJK.”
- “Our family treats it as a happening. After 47 years ... we wouldn’t have it any other way. It’s family.” @Billsfan9Don
- A family that’s been through Ups and Downs. The underdog, that’s what makes us so great. #LoyalBond.”
  - “This simply cannot be put into words. Impossible.” @derekchoj
  - “Family sticking together through the ups and downs and most importantly Billieving.” @Kevin6522
  - “Being a Bills fan teaches you a lot about life. About things that aren’t easy, about loyalty and sticking by things.” @BillsBGer
  - “UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.” @jwestbuffny620
  - “Whether during a winning season or a not-so-good season, when Bills fans walk into the Ralph, hearts beat faster and smiles erupt.” @BagnoliEileen
  - “To be a Bills fan means to perpetuate hope. Every year, no matter what, this is our year.” @daluyet
  - “To be strong, persevere through the tough times, cheer hard, never back down and the best fans in the world.” @takeitback26
  - “We buffalonians are the true definition of the word FAN. Nobody circles the wagon like the Buffalo Bills + Mafia!” @juan\_cerva1982
  - It teaches you to never give up on anything good or bad, and how to believe in something.”

There are a few core things built into every response I’ve read; family and loyalty; unwavering loyalty, not only to our team but to this city and each other. We aren’t “fair-weather fans.” We’re a family that rallies year-round, year after year, in the undying and undiminished hope that maybe, just maybe, this could be our year!

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