



INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

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Sports appetite expands in WNY

INDUSTRY LEADERS SEE CONTINUED GROWTH



JIM COURTNEY

Discussing the business of sports last month at Hodgson Russ were, seated from left; Ted Black, Bill Maher and Jerry Boyes. Standing from left; Ron Raccuia, Brian Cavanaugh, Bridget Niland and Allan Davis.

BY JAMES FINK
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Four college athletic directors, the president of the Buffalo Sabres and leaders of two sports-related companies met last month for a discussion on the sports business in Western New York. The event was part of a monthly roundtable series sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP and Freed Maxick.

The 90-minute discussion explored a range of issues includ-

ing the growth of the sector, the regional impact, the growing need for a sports commission and the increased demand for facilities to accommodate youth athletics.

An edited transcript of the conversation begins on Page 23.

The roundtable also provided a lead-in for a July 30 panel comprised of the owners of the area's major sports teams: Terry and Kim Pegula, who own the Buffalo Sabres and Buffalo Bills; and Robert and Mindy Rich, owners of the Buffalo Bisons.

Also scheduled to take part are National Hockey League Commissioner Gary Bettman and Jeremy Jacobs, chairman of the Buffalo-based Delaware North Cos.

Jacobs has owned the Boston Bruins since 1975 and is chairman of the NHL board of governors.

The panel will be held from 10 a.m. to noon at Buffalo RiverWorks, 359 Ganson St.

"We consider this an important panel," said Jack Connors, president and publisher of Business First. "To be able to have these industry

leaders offer some insight about how sports operate in markets like Buffalo should be valuable and interesting."

The panel comes as the Buffalo Bills begin their first training camp under the Pegulas' ownership and as NHL teams open their training camps for the 2015-2016 season.

The Buffalo Bisons will be entering their final month of the regular season.

Tickets for the July 30 roundtable can be purchased by calling 541-1631.

► BY THE NUMBERS

The business side of area sports

\$758,000

Cost of 3,700 new, wider seats at Coca-Cola Field

\$52M

Value of Ryan O'Reilly's 7-year contract with the Buffalo Sabres

\$25M

Value of Buffalo Bills coach Rex Ryan's 5-year contract

350

Number of people employed in Buffalo by Delaware North Cos.

INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

► What's your view of the sports business locally?

TED BLACK

President, Buffalo Sabres

My view on the importance of business and otherwise of sports in Western New York is that it's just part of the fabric. It's part of every conversation. Allan's business turns on that conversation, as well. But the appetite that Western New York has for hockey is almost endless. The hockey knowledge and the appetite in this market really, really makes it unique. And it's very much like a Canadian market when it comes to professional hockey.

ALLAN DAVIS

Program director,
WGR Sports Radio 550

I may not have wanted to speak to this, but Ted brought it up a little bit about the game of hockey and how much Buffalo and the fabric of Buffalo is hockey. It is, and it's not just here. Obviously it's throughout Southern Ontario. So how important it is, I think it's critical. And I also think it's from the ground up and has been. I think Ralph Wilson saw that years ago. Did he come here because he thought

► CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROUNDTABLE

The Business of Sports Industry Roundtable is the 22nd in a two-year series of discussions with Western New York business leaders.

Each month, decision makers from diverse industries meet for a discussion moderated by Business First.

Excerpts from the conversation are published two weeks after the roundtable.

Upcoming topics include manufacturing and fast-growing companies.

Roundtable discussions, sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP and Freed Maxick CPAs, are held at the law firm's Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

he could grow football? I tend to think he came here because football was already here in everybody's blood, and it's the same for hockey. And for WGR, it's probably the best opportunity I've personally had in working with a community where it is that important and it's reflective in how well the radio station does.

RON RACCUIA

President, ADPRO Sports

ADPRO started ... actually, I don't really remember when we started. I always tell people it started in about 2000, 2001 when we became a Nike distributor. ADPRO really has two components: one component that works with schools, organizations, athletes, providing them their product and equipment on field. And then we have another component that does branding and merchandise for our friends – the Bills, the Sabres,

other NFL teams and corporations, all tied to the idea of sports marketing and also tied to the No. 1 brand in the world, Nike. We employ almost 70 people. Buffalo's been perfect for us just because there's so much athletic activity on the field, if you start there. A ton of colleges, high schools that take athletics very seriously, all use it kind of in the function of the Roman management. When you talk about development and things like that, there's really a brand affinity toward their athletic programs, whether that's from high school level all the way through their college level. And then we take it to the corporations. We have currently, and have had, a very robust sports economy here in Western New York. And with what the Bulls have done with the investments going on at the colleges and everywhere else, it's just going to be better and better. And we're excited to be a part of that.

JERRY BOYES

Director of athletics,
SUNY Buffalo State



I found very early, I guess I'd use the word passionate that Buffalo fans are with sports. I never knew a real passionate fan until I came to Buffalo. I remember going to my first Buffalo Bills game after that first season and sitting there and I was being a coach, kind of watching the offensive line do their thing, then the defensive backs. And about the third quarter, this lady sitting next to me elbowed me and said, "Are you going to cheer or what?" My wife refuses to go back to any games with me. But we're a Division 3 NCAA institution and we sit in a hotbed of professional sports, and it really is a hotbed. We're just one of those entities and it's very difficult for a city the size of Buffalo sometimes to really advertise and, I guess, promote Division 3 sports and what's going on with them; we fully understand that. Our job in Division 3 is a different philosophy than pro and Division 1 where they must. And



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INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

the emphasis is on the spectator. Our emphasis is on the experience of the student athlete. We don't have the personnel administratively to do all those promotional things and neat things at halftimes and other things of that nature because we don't have the people; we don't have that manpower to do that. Our emphasis is on the student athlete, and that's where we put our resources into those things. But I see the sports culture here is unlike anything that I certainly was exposed to before. And it's very exciting to be in sports and to be in Buffalo.

**BILL MAHER**

Director of athletics, Canisius College

I have had a great opportunity to spend a good portion of my career here in Western New York and Buffalo. And I would say that, as many people have talked about, the passion and what

people in Western New York feel about sports is unique. I describe Buffalo as the biggest small town in America. Everybody knows everybody and everybody has a recollection of history, whether it be the Bills, Sabres, Canisius, the Little Three – different things of that nature. I think our challenge as we move forward, and certainly for Canisius College, is to make sure we embrace that history but how do we also try and carve out a new niche and find our way in what's a developing economy in Western New York. And I think as we see the economy developing, which is wonderful for everybody, I think that also opens up opportunity for us which we're all going to have to try and figure out where do we fit in that developing economy and how can it benefit all of us?

BRIDGET NILAND

Director of athletics, Daemen College

I was a runner at UB. I started out as actually a Division 3 athlete. My focus has been primarily collegiate sports after going to the University at Buffalo law school. I went to Indianapolis and worked at the NCAA national office for six years, primarily in legislative affairs. I've maintained my relationship with the NCAA and I stay on as a consultant, so I have both kind of a national viewpoint and a very local viewpoint of what we're doing. For eight years I was a sports management professor at Daemen, so I look at the Buffalo marketplace probably a little wider than even some of you sitting in this

room because it really is a component of recreation, youth sports, which is very strong in Buffalo. I think there's a real opportunity in youth tourism. I was asked by the president to step in last year and my sole responsibility at Daemen is to drive us through the NCAA process. I think we're trying to do that in a way that kind of taps into my broader experience, either nationally or just the experience of youth sports and how that can be used to kind of bolster our location. Because that's about all we have going for us at the present time in terms of really finding Daemen's way in this larger sports marketplace.

From our end of the Division 3, sports is enticing student athletes to come to your school, enroll in your school, stay in your school and get a degree and keep the enrollment management up to where it needs to be to keep the school in business.

► **Ted, with HarborCenter bringing in youth and amateur tournaments, talk about this business of sports in Western New York.**

**TED BLACK**

Buffalo Sabres

Well, a lot of it turns on selling tickets. If you look at any pro hockey team, about 30, 35 percent of your revenue is going to be selling tickets, selling the game. So HarborCenter, it's something that's not unique to Buffalo, it's unique for North America. And it leaves us with the only three-rink campus in the NHL. It changes the skyline and with it is going to change the perceptions of Buffalo. A couple of weeks ago we had 120 kids going to be drafted in the NHL. When I spoke to that group – I like to do this when I get to talk to the young hockey players – “Is this your first time in Buffalo? Show of hands?” Just about everyone raises their hand in that room. So their first impression of Buffalo is one of a sunny, 70-degree day looking out over the water, going to a concert at Canalside which took place that week, thousands of people there.

► **Is the HarborCenter a symbol of what Ron alluded to as the sports economy?**

TED BLACK

Buffalo Sabres

I think it's deeper than that. I don't want to sound sacrilegious but it's almost a religious/political statement about our community. I think people look to that with ... it's just a shining example of nice things can come here and nice things go out of here.

RON RACCUIA

ADPRO Sports

You know, you talk about that business. I can't really totally speak for Allan, but I know their ratings are off the charts. That's indicative of the community and the reaction to sports. If you look at companies like New Era who have maintained their presence here, an industry leader in the sports world, but then you take it a step further in this whole economy of sports ... You take the simple things. Look at food and beverage. When there are Bills and Sabres games, the food and beverage operations in Western New York are at their peak. When the teams are performing well, there's a lot of co-branding going on and merchandise being sold – not just merchandise we sell but an everyday type of co-branding. The collective spirit rises, so that will actually get people to spend money. There have been studies that say if you have brand affinity and you do something that you like, the money and the economy flows freer. Those things are indisputable. Here in Buffalo, unfortunately, you haven't had a ton of on-field success, but the success that they've had off the field and from a business standpoint is amazing considering we haven't had that run of on-field or on-ice championships. So the way I look at it is even today still a driver, but what can be as the teams develop and the infrastructure around HarborCenter and First Niagara and what ultimately happens with the New Bills stadium? That really is going to be a very robust economy.

► **As a follow-up to that, is there a place in Western New York where we can emulate on a lesser scale what HarborCenter has done for amateur and other youth sports?**

RON RACCUIA

ADPRO Sports

That's really a facilities question. Everybody is searching for that right now. What HarborCenter is for hockey is like Ted says: It's not unique to this

country, it's probably unique to the world. And I think all of us have been involved in conversations – I know looking around the room – about how you replicate that for youth soccer and how you replicate that for softball and baseball, things like that. Right now it's seriously a question of facilities.

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

Director of athletics, D'Youville College

My daughter is a swimmer and she's a softball player. Bridget's a mother and Jerry's a father – see him out there with his son with baseball – and swimming is huge in this community.

**BRIDGET NILAND**

Daemen College

I always say that between the different hats that I wear across the board, I said this year if I had my own money to really invest in turf time, ice time, pool time – because whether I'm a parent or an athletic

director, I'm in constant search. As I mentioned, our greatest challenge at Daemen is we don't have facilities. I think that that's where I see the opportunity outside of what I do at Daemen College, in terms of talking to all the people. Brian knows that. We're five years from where he was, searching for a soccer field, and how we built our soccer field. Tom Garigen from Empire Soccer has really been a leader in bringing us all together to try to get a couple of facilities very similar to Sahlen's facilities. But we need more Sahlen's facilities, and they probably need to be more of a public-private. And I know that the city of Buffalo is looking at that, as well. But if we were able to build some of those facilities that would support both potentially a future professional sports franchise here and soccer, to further support lacrosse – all those things – I think it will drive the economy in a different way. Living in Indianapolis, they had a very active sports commission, and I think that's something Buffalo really needs to look at in terms of empowering that group a little bit more. We're all doing our own thing in separate silos. And I feel that as a city, we really need to look at having those types of sports commissions like Indianapolis and Mobile, Alabama.

INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

BILL MAHER

Canisius College

There have been studies done that the last thing families will cut out of their budget is youth sports, and I think that many of us here have lived it; I think you can see that. In my time in Buffalo and working with the Sports Commission to try and attract events, there's the shortages Ron mentioned in facilities. Once there is a facility, it's filled. When you look at our facilities on our campuses, we've built them. You look at what the HarborCenter's done – everyone was concerned about the HarborCenter taking business away from everyone else. It didn't; it just created more opportunity. And I think that's where you're going to see it, whether it's soccer fields, whether it's baseball fields, whether it's indoor turf facilities during the off-times. Those facilities will be utilized, and I think we will find different ways to monetize them through bed taxes and things -- there's a lot of money that is generated within this community for youth sports.

RON RACCUIA

ADPRO Sports

If you think about the future of a potential football stadium, just multiply it by a lot. And like Bridget and Bill said, Indianapolis is the absolute perfect model for it. That football stadium is not a dream. That football stadium was a catalyst for an economy done right.

BRIDGET NILAND

Daemen College

It was a great experience to live in Indianapolis, especially at the time that we lived there because, you know, it used to be Indiana No Place. I do think Indy is a real good example of it. I lived there and I think there's a lot of things that Buffalo has – hockey, the location, the waterfront. Louisville is another example of a town that has really capitalized. But when you go to Louisville and you're walking around Louisville, it's nice. Indianapolis isn't Buffalo. You know, it's just being able to kind of get everyone together and on the same page, and that's where those two cities have probably been somewhere we can look to in bringing all the different entities to the table.

► **With collegiate and pro teams competing for the same sports entertainment dollars, is there enough financial support to keep everybody happy?**

ALLAN DAVIS

WGR Sports Radio 550

Well, I look at it from a different point of view. I wish I had 48 hours

in every 24-hour day to be able to serve all the people who would love to have the opportunity to have access to WGR to get their message out there. To some extent, yeah, it probably does get sliced up differently. But I take a look at what you set as your plan. If your plan is, as Bridget is talking about, if it is about youth sports, there's ways to get it done. I think a sports commission getting together to talk about these things even like this would help answer that question. I think there is probably enough money. There's certainly enough interest. It's about is there a collective approach to some of it.

BILL MAHER

Canisius College

There's a group that's going to be coming, ironically, from Indianapolis that is going to work with the Sports Commission to really focus on Western New York and look carefully at what is our infrastructure inventory right now. And if we were to look at this and say ... if we were going to make recommendations on, "If you're going to invest, this is the areas we should invest in in trying to position Western New York as positively as it can." Position them as positively as they can to attract these events because of the trickle-down effect they will have.

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

D'Youville College

We all know that there's a pecking order with regard to the Bills, Sabres and media and promotion. Youth sports is huge in this area, and I was surprised that when I got to D'Youville and I wanted to go out and rent a soccer field, it was more difficult for me to rent a soccer field than it was for me to rent an hour of ice time. It drove me crazy for a long period of time. And I see when I go to swimming events the number of people who are swimming. High school sports and youth sports are huge in this area. And in our own city and in the suburbs there are great facilities.



RON RACCUIA

ADPRO Sports

And it really isn't a saturation point. You know, the Bills have their record season ticket sales. The Sabres are unbelievable with waiting lists and what they're doing. You know, UB's growing, Canisius is growing. There

is always money for sports. There is always disposable income. Like Bill said, it is the last thing that gets cut because of that affinity and that passion. And you even see the sponsorship dollars increasing. Corporations know that how you get to the consumer is through their affinity and their branding with their sports programs, right from colleges all the way up through professional ranks.

► **Allan, let's talk about the media. What could the media do to offer more extensive coverage to collegiate athletics and the Buffalo Bisons?**

ALLAN DAVIS

WGR Sports Radio 550

Well, we carry the Bisons. It's not just WGR. We recognize that because of the appetite and the only way to get the extra 24 hours is we have another radio station. We have ESPN 1520 that does carry the Bison games and we carry the UB Bulls, football, basketball and women's basketball, as well. We have had Niagara on and, as often as we can, we use ESPN 1520. It's not an easy thing to answer on a day-to-day basis: How come I don't

get more coverage? I will tell you that the way people use radio determines how we program our radio station. In today's world, you better get to the point in 60 seconds or you've lost my attention. We stick with what I know works best in this community to draw in an audience, to get them to come in – and it's the Bills and the Sabres. WGR is successful because every time somebody turns on the radio, we're not asking them to wait very long before we're talking about what it is they want to hear. And that, as our research shows, is the Bills and the Sabres. If we said, "I'm going to spend an afternoon talking about the Bisons" or "I'm going to be talking about the UB Bulls or Buff State," if there's a story there, we will – a huge story. But otherwise, we're not going to win. Our advertisers aren't going to win. Our audience is not going to stay with us, and that's critical for us. When somebody pounds on my door long enough, loud enough, I'm going to react. I'm going to do something. The Bulls did that. They pounded harder and they got my attention. So those who take that opportunity not to wait for us to react but are proactive probably would get a little more of a response.

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INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

JERRY BOYES

SUNY Buffalo State

And that's what we found, because the Buffalo News made a business decision probably more than a decade ago, through their research, that it's the Bills, the Sabres, Division 1 high school, and then ...

BRIDGET NILAND

Daemen College

The rest of us.

JERRY BOYES

SUNY Buffalo State

The rest of us. Just before I came here, I heard the stories of the second newspaper, the Courier, and how sports friendly they were. So competition drives that a little bit. When you don't have that, when you're a one-newspaper city, they are going to hear their viewers and respond appropriately. We understand that to a degree – not saying we like it, because we feel our core of the students who come to our colleges are Western New York. So they're the ones who grew up here. They were covered pretty well, high school-wise, and then they come to our schools and they don't get that name recognition anymore in the paper. That's a challenge for us.

RON RACCUIA

ADPRO Sports

Your question about media is not unique to Western New York either. We do business with some 250 colleges throughout the country, and if we had the 250 athletic directors here in this room, all but two or three of them would say the exact same thing. It's just the nature of radio and TV. But the social media has just taken over it all and really drives it. And even from an economic standpoint, you can accomplish a lot more through social media quickly than you can through – no offense – through some traditional means.

**ALLAN DAVIS**

WGR Sports Radio 550

WGR, through its platforms, gets a million hits a month – a million hits a month on desktop computers and an additional million hits a month from mobile devices.

► **And that's growing.****ALLAN DAVIS**

WGR Sports Radio 550

And it's growing. It was recognized as the third-largest radio station that way in the country. When you looked at the population base, how many of those people in that population base per capita selected a radio station website or digital platform within a month? And they looked across the country to what stations are doing the best. Our Twitter accounts are amazing. We connect as much to our fans, to Bills fans and to Sabres fans as much on Twitter as we do over the air. We don't have to take as many calls on a day-to-day basis because we have the great, engaging levels and the interactions going on in the Twitter world.

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

D'Youville College

Jerry was spot-on with his comments with regard to prioritizing by the media. We take a look at our constituency and we don't reach out to the Buffalo News; we don't reach out to GR. But we realize that with the limited staff that we have, where are we going to put our energies? We're now streaming our own games to our parents and whoever wants to watch the games and get to the local newspapers, get to the Bees and get to the papers that are going to pick up what you're going to send to them. It doesn't mean ignore the Buffalo News, but it's interesting to pick up a Buffalo News Sunday and say, "I hope my score is in there on Page D7 down at the bottom so my president can see it."

BRIDGET NILAND

Daemen College

Absolutely.

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

D'Youville College

So my vice president doesn't pick up the phone and call me at home and it's 11 on Sunday morning after church and say, "How come the score wasn't in the paper?" Then I have to call the SID – did you call them? Yes, I called them. Did you send it? Yes, I sent it. Tell me the name of the intern that you talked to. Was Milt Northrup on that desk? I want to know who you talked to, all right? So you do make the efforts with their limited resources, but social media has changed quite a bit. Our colleges would drool if we could have a college page once a week like the high schools have. We would love that; it would be great: "Wow, we got a whole page in the Buffalo News."

BILL MAHER

Canisius College

You know, I've spent a lot of time thinking about this – the media question – and responding to the media question because our fans and alums always ask about it. "How come there's not more coverage?" And I'd say it's a little bit of a chicken and an egg. I would say very, very consistently, if there is a preview story in the Buffalo News before one of our big games, our attendance is higher. It's measurable; there's no doubt about it. So the fact that we are not able to generate a preview story in the Buffalo News for everyone, it causes us difficulty, for sure. The Buffalo News is going to focus as everyone's talked here – they're going to focus on football for UB. They're going to focus on basketball. And they've done a very good job of hockey. The other sports – we have 20 sports, and our other sports fall in line with everybody else in Western New York and they don't get the coverage that we'd like them to have for the efforts that the kids put in.

► **How concerned are the four of you who are college athletic directors with the viability of your programs?****BRIDGET NILAND**

Daemen College

We're going through the NCAA membership process so the next thing about that is like they force us to do that. I mean, you're talking to – Jerry's public, so he has money – but you're talking to about three people, we're all pretty similar. We're tuition-driven, so our business model is to drive students to our school. Our athletic programs will be valued not so much on wins and losses. I mean, they are, because that's what drives it, but I think we probably get more questions about how many students we're bringing in than whether we've won championships. I know that's what my president is concerned about. He's concerned about two things: the students we bring in and the visibility that we bring in and whether that visibility is through website hits, because our athletics website gets more hits now than our general student body website sometimes.

► **Did that really push your move to Division 3?****BRIDGET NILAND**

Daemen College

Division 2.

► **Sorry.****BRIDGET NILAND**

Daemen College

It's all right. No, you know what? It's great. I'm educating everybody on that, so what definitely drove our move to Division 2 is the fact that it is a crowded marketplace in Buffalo and that there was no point in going Division 3 because we get confused with D'Youville all the time. I don't know how many times people say, "How are things at D'Youville, Bridget?" And I'm like, "They're fabulous." No, but it's to find that niche. I mean, at the end of the day, we are in the business of sports, but I think the three of us and the four of us, really we're in the business of higher education. So we need to define our niche. There was no point in trying to compete with the long-standing alumni that exists at Canisius and Niagara. We didn't want the Division 3 model; that didn't work for us. We'd like to be able to give athletic scholarships to enhance our enrollment. At that time there was no Division 2 schools at all in Western New York. So for us, it did drive it and it is very much a strategy. I mean, if you don't have a strategy on what you're doing and why you're doing it in college sports right now, you might as well not be doing anything, in my opinion.

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

D'Youville College

I think the university sector, especially the private sector, is going through some challenging times right now. And the school will look at athletics as enrollment management. I think Canisius is – especially with the hockey program being down at the HarborCenter, all their sports – things are looking really, really good. Bridget, the way that she's moving with Division 2 which is the scholarship situation at Daemen, and where they're moving is extremely good. My future with D'Youville, there's going to be a new president in place next July, a year from now. It will be interesting to see where our direction goes, from the board of trustees hiring a new president to where that's going to go for the next five years and how it will impact our athletic programs. But we are enrollment management, and when you look at the numbers and the strength of our numbers, I came to D'Youville 10 years, 11 years ago, we had 85 student athletes and 10 sports. Ten years later we have 14 sports and last year over 220 student athletes, and we're looking to even add more sports down the road.

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JERRY BOYES

SUNY Buffalo State

I'll give you some statistics. NCAA, Division 3 – there are 435 institutions in Division 3, and enrollment ranges from D'Youville, which is currently how many students?

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

D'Youville College

Undergrad, 2,000.

JERRY BOYES

SUNY Buffalo State

2,000. There are a number of private schools that are under 1,000 in Division 3. Up to Buffalo State, that's close to 8,000 full-time. But the average Division 3 institution is 2,300 students. When you take all those 435 enrollments and divide them, it's 2,300 students. The average enrollment of student athletes at those institutions is well over 500. So you take away athletics from those institutions and you close the doors. It's become more apparent at the SUNY schools because of what Brian says with enrollment in the Northeast Atlantic side of the country where high school populations have really bottomed out. And they don't see it coming back up – this pendulum swinging for another eight to 10 years. But at the same time, the real good presidents, the trustees, recognize that athletics is vital to the existence of the college.

BRIDGET NILAND

Daemen College

I heard a great quote. Because people ask how are things and it always comes down to who your president is, we were talking about that, how supportive they are. And then I asked the one guy who's in our conference and he coaches and he just said he'll stay where he's at right now as long as it's still about winning. And I think that quote in general kind of talks about where sports are in higher education. Because what he was getting at is he's got a new president and if she takes the eye off of winning and puts it too much on enrollment, he personally doesn't want to be involved. I don't know if you would have heard that quote as much 10 years ago in the Northeast.

JERRY BOYES

SUNY Buffalo State

One thing I will add with the business side of sports in previous is that from a recruitment standpoint, we must sell Buffalo. And that's an easy sell with a lot of the things going on, particularly of late. We're a different college. Being a SUNY college in the city of Buffalo, sometimes that works for us, other times works against us. It evens out,

But when we bring our recruits in, it is selling what's going on in Buffalo, in the pro sports and all the things that are going on, and that is a sports city. So Buffalo has to sell itself. And all the new things that are going on with Canalside and all those things, when you put together any identity pieces now, you want to make sure you include Buffalo in those identity pieces.

► Do you feel an obligation to promote Buffalo?

TED BLACK

Buffalo Sabres

Yes, but it's not a burdensome obligation. It's something that we love to do. I'm fascinated as sort of an outsider how hesitant Buffalo is to brag about itself. I lived in Room 430 of the Embassy Suites for 126 nights, not that I'm counting, but I didn't even know Elmwood Village existed. And I ended up buying there. It has a mix of a couple of different communities. There's nothing to apologize about Buffalo. It's a small city – that's a strength. Sort of the old axiom: Take your weakness and make it your strength. And I do that all the time. Why wouldn't you want to live as a pro athlete in the smallest U.S. city in the NHL? Do we have a lot of self-interest? Absolutely. Is it something we do with passion and gratefulness? For sure.

BILL MAHER

Canisius College

I think all boats rise with the tide. I use that term within our program and it applies to Western New York. As Western New York improves, anybody who's going to come and view Canisius College, there's going to be more of them and they're going to have a more favorable impression of our community from it.

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

D'Youville College

I was born in Buffalo, so I'm a proud Buffalonian and I always have been. I take a look at the NHL people who come in here and spend some time here and want to make their home here because they love it so much. They love the community, love the cost of living. People will say, "How can you live in Buffalo?" I say, "What are you talking about? It's a great city." They say, "Look at your February." I say, "Go look at my June or July."

BRIDGET NILAND

Daemen College

I think that sometimes we aren't our own good ambassadors, and I think Ted brings up a great point. I remember, and I don't expect ever to get any type of good coverage from

BFO because I remember that they were doing like the top 10 moments in Buffalo's history and like No. 2 was "wide right." Sometimes we are our own worst enemy in Buffalo, and we're still talking about something that happened long ago where, yeah, we didn't win a game. How many times did you not win a game? You can't ruminate over any game. And I get it was the Super Bowl. Because if we were like every other city, you pick yourself up, you dust yourself off and you move on.

TED BLACK

Buffalo Sabres

I don't think the old way of being negative works anymore. Allan, your ratings were pretty good this year on your station?

ALLAN DAVIS

WGR Sports Radio 550

Absolutely.

TED BLACK

Buffalo Sabres

We had our worst year ever. So did you find that beating us up every day – I'm glad you didn't – created more listeners? You found a niche to talk about a rebuild and a process and a plan and that works great for me because that's what we're doing, but it sort of changed the paradigm of what the negativity didn't sell as much as trying to communicate a plan.



ALLAN DAVIS

WGR Sports Radio 550

Yeah. Bridget, what you say, you want to get rid of the "wide right" and "no goal." The fact of the matter is a win does that. A win does that and this past year, we won because the strategy was losing. And

once people understood that, they were with us every day; they were there every day. "What's the latest? What's the latest?" Believe it or not, there are a number of people who follow the Sabres who are season ticket holders who understood it from the beginning. They understood it from the beginning that this is for our future. This is a time for us to get ready for tomorrow. We're not just focusing on today now. We're actually looking ahead to tomorrow. And I believe the Buffalo Bills are doing that, as well. And so there's all this hope and I've heard the comment made that nobody sells hope more like the Buffalo Bills.

And I've always argued that that's not true. We've always had hope. We've been that close a number of times, so we've always had hope. It's just disappointing to lose. And so we carry that around with us all the time.

BRIDGET NILAND

Daemen College

I would never argue that it's not. But my point is we're never going to get back to winning if we still keep focusing in Buffalo on the times that we've lost. I guess that's my point. And that's not necessarily what you do or what you do, but in Buffalo in general, as the people who live here and as the folks who go to the grocery stores every day, of changing that mindset, of instilling the hope that you're talking about. And yes, that will come with a win, but I think we have held ourselves back at times because we've ruminated too many times over the losses. And any good coach will tell you, you spend too many times thinking about your losses, you're never going to get back to the win.

BRIAN CAVANAUGH

D'Youville College

I think our anxiety level has changed with Terry Pegula, I really do. I've lived in this community my whole life, and Terry Pegula taking over the Sabres, the financial resources to take that organization and redo that organization – there was a time even during the Seymour Knox era, then after that, where spending was a real concern for everything and they tightened their belt and there were times where we could have resigned people or gotten people and it wasn't going to happen because of the structure of the ownership. And I think this new ownership with the Sabres is in a position to where, hey whatever we need resources-wise, we're going to move forward and do it. We're right at the beginning of what I think is going to be a great era for both the Bills and the Sabres, and a lot of it has to do with Terry Pegula and his family invested in two major organizations. Two organizations that are now stable in Buffalo, are going to be here in Buffalo, going to be here in Western New York. We're talking the stadium. We've got a brand-new HarborCenter down there, and a lot of that has to do with Pegula. And I think the whole attitude of our community is, "You know what? Things are looking better now. We've got somebody who really loves Buffalo and is investing his financial resources in Western New York." So there are other areas that need to be looked at from a business standpoint to make people be able to get downtown without having to drive downtown. But I think our whole anxiety level has changed in the last five years and a lot of it is because of Terry Pegula.