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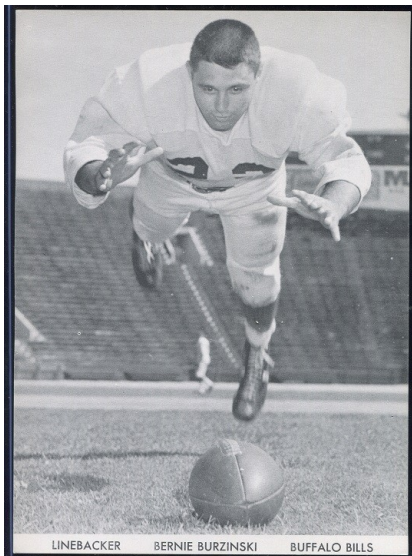
### Bernie Buzyniski

**This article is written by Budd Bailey.**

A number of football players from Western New York have played at least a portion of their career for the Buffalo Bills. Consider yourself a Bills' expert if you knew the answer to which one suited up for the Bills first. The answer, as you may have guessed, is Bernie Buzyniski – the pride of Lockport back in the day.

Bernard Buzyniski Jr. was born on May 3, 1938, in Lockport – about 30 miles northeast of Buffalo. His parents were Bernard Sr. and Nellie. Bernie, who naturally picked up the nickname of “Buzz” along the way, went to high school at DeSales in Lockport. It closed in 1989 after 43 years of operation.

After playing for DeSales, Bernie graduated in 1956 and headed east to play college football. He landed in Massachusetts at Holy Cross, where he was a two-way end for the Crusaders. If nothing else, Holy Cross was consistent in that era under head coach Edward Anderson, who had played under Notre Dame head coach Knute Rockne. Anderson is in the College Football Hall of Fame. The team always had a winning record, but was never good enough to capture much attention. The schedule ranged from Penn State to Dartmouth in 1957, when Buzyniski played a little bit (two pass receptions for 22 yards) as a sophomore in a 5-3-1 season.



LINEBACKER    BERNIE BURZINSKI    BUFFALO BILLS



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A year later, the Crusaders were 6-3-1, losing to Pittsburgh, Penn State and Boston College. Bernie was up to three catches for the season for 42 yards, with a touchdown. He did have some minor injuries that may have restricted his playing time. In 1959, Holy Cross was more or less on schedule with a typical 6-4 record. Buzyniski had by far his best season with 17 receptions for 317 yards and a touchdown. The score came on what was described by a reporter as a “spectacular” 60-yard catch on October 3 in a 20-0 win over Villanova.

Bernie led the team in receptions, although his total of 17 doesn’t sound like an imposing number today. But quarterback Ken Komodzinski only completed 38 of 111 throws with three touchdowns as the team’s No. 1 quarterback. It was a different era. It’s perhaps worth noting that a list of the top football players in Holy Cross history has Buzyniski ranked at No. 19. He is not in the school’s Varsity Club Hall of Fame.

Buzyniski picked a good year to be a graduating senior football player. The American Football League was scheduled to begin play in 1960 as it took on the established National Football League. The AFL’s teams had a long list of draft choices as they prepared to open for business. For example, the Dallas Texans picked 53 players. Even so, Bernie was not selected by anyone in the AFL or NFL. Still, Buzyniski signed in April a contract with the Dallas Cowboys in the NFL and was given a chance to compete for a job at training camp.

That association didn’t last long, as he was released by the team on August 30. Bernie didn’t have to wait long for a second opportunity to play pro football, signing with the Buffalo Bills on September 9. Buzyniski came with a good recommendation from a football legend. “Buzyniski was with the Cowboys for seven weeks and (head coach Tom) Landry liked the way he adapted to being a linebacker,” Coach Buster Ramsey said to *The Buffalo News*. “But with more experienced players like Gene Cronin and Jerry Tubbs available and the pressure of producing quickly in that city, Tom couldn’t wait for Buzyniski to develop his full potential.”

Bernie was on the roster on September 11, when the Bills played the New York Titans in their first AFL game. Bernie checked in at 6-foot-3 and 228 pounds, and Ramsey wasted no time getting him into the lineup at outside linebacker. “Buzyniski will be our right linebacker with Archie Matsos moving back to his more familiar middle spot,” Ramsey said before the game. “Dennis Remmert will play the left side.”

When Bernie took the field for the first time that day for the opener, he was the only player with Western New York roots on the roster – and thus made a little bit of local football history. Buzyniski played all 14 games that initial season, and started 11 of them, playing both outside linebacker spots. The highlight might have been an interception in a



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September 23 game against the Patriots in Boston. It no doubt helped the Bills notch a 13-0 win, the first in their history. Buffalo finished up the 1960 season with a 5-8-1 record.

Buzyniski was a natural to play with the Bills' offseason basketball team the following winter. After all, he didn't change addresses once the football season was over. What's more, he must have been a good player in those games played against such opponents as high school faculty members. It was reported that Buzyniski had 21 points to lead the Bills in a 61-60 loss to the Ellicottville Loggers, dropping the team's record to 6-2 for the season at that point.

Buzyniski returned his signed contract to the Bills in May of that year, and participated in training camp with the team. But when the final cuts were announced on September 5, Bernie was one of few starters from the AFL in 1960 who were dropped. It's probably worth noting that there was a relatively famous name on the Bills' list of cuts that day, although not for his football-playing abilities. Ron Luciano, who eventually became a well-known major league baseball umpire, joined Burzynski on the cut list.

Buzyniski spent much of the rest of his life in Western New York, as he also lived in Newfane. There are a couple of references to him in newspapers in which he spoke at public meetings concerning environmental matters, including one in Lockport in 1993.

Buzyniski died of renal disease on September 11, 2008, in Winter Haven, Florida. Bernie was survived by wife CeCe (they married in Lockport in 1961), but only for six days as CeCe died on September 17. They had two children, Patricia and Thomas. A grandson, Matthew Prizzi, played defensive back for Towson University from 1999 to 2002.

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AinsworthSports.com.

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