

By BRIAN ACKLEY
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It's a shame that the National Hockey League is going dark, especially here in Buffalo. Because who knew that a few select areas – ours included – would lose professional football at the same time.

OK, relax. A bit of a cheap shot at the Bills start, to be sure; a start that's about the width of a Breathe Right nose strip away from being undefeated by the way. It's a little silly to hear fans on the verge of jumping off our spectacular new signature bridge – well, if we actually had one. And, true, it is distressing knowing that act would require more agility than our current signal caller is able to actually muster.

Strangely, though, this might all be a good thing, a cosmic confluence of events that will be the Bills' salvation. Most conventional thinkers thought Tom Donahoe – who indeed came with a pretty sterling reputations as a NFL front office type – took the reins in an attempt to bring us all a Super Bowl.

But really, c'mon, how can a guy that good be just so incredibly wrong on virtually every major football decision he's made since he's been here. Hiring Gregg Williams? Drafting Mike Williams? Trading for Drew Bledsoe?

Trust us on this one. Bad luck, or convenient precursors to a string of events destined to leave us a healthy, robust franchise?

For example, it's no coincidence that the winless Bills must next face defending Super Bowl champion New England, meaning 0-3 is as close as the Nate Clemens blown pass coverage.

That will inevitably lead to more dissention, more fans lining up at the would-be signature bridge, and in the end, about a four-win season. The Bills can't win next year either, because as "fate" would have it, the team's future franchise quarterback broke his leg this preseason, meaning that 2005 will be J.P. Losman's first real NFL campaign, and everyone knows you can't win with a rookie quarterback in this league.

At that point despair will be so deep that Tom Donahoe will be fired, and who can expect to win in the first year of a new general manager? Funny how those guys always like to make it "their" team – paging Mr. Mularkey, please report to GM's office, and bring your playbook with you -- which should account for at least a couple more bleak and downtrodden years. New team president Tony Masiello then spends the next three years making plans to turn Paul Maguire's Press Box Club into a native American casino – while turning over all scouting, drafting and contract signing responsibilities to the Buffalo Control Board -- further delaying the Bills' return to respectability.

Unlike his mayoral tenure, however, and on a happier note, we can report Masiello – working out of his office in the still empty Memorial Auditorium while final details are being worked out between Buffalo and Bass Pro – does get one thing right, resisting the temptation to re-sign 51 year-old Doug Flutie to once again come in and save the franchise.

Hilliary Clinton will have already served four years in the White House before the Bills might ever be good again, a term which will coincide with the National Hockey League resurfacing as remotely relevant. Ralph Wilson will be off the senior tennis circuit which clearly will be the sports equivalent of match point for the eternally optimistic team owner. The team's "for sale" sign won't be far behind.

Then, and only by then, will enough time have passed from this unimaginably painful string of events that Bob Rich's son or daughter (if he has one) will have fallen madly in love with the son or daughter (careful here) of Jeremy Jacobs (if he has one). This creates the lone Buffalo "super" family which will actually be able to cut the billion dollar or so check it will take to clear up the long-hanging dark cloud of what happens to the Bills when Wilson permanently double faults.

None of it, of course, happens without an 0-2 start. And you thought you should be depressed.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)