

Getting that prized Bills playoff ticket not as easy as it was 25 years ago

Lucky few get the chance to attend a rare playoff game

BY TERRY DUFFY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Attending the Bills first playoff game last Saturday at Bills Stadium was one of the most exciting, fun experiences ever.

But just getting to that point in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic was something else. And I'm not talking of the Bills historical climb throughout 2020 to claim the AFC East.

As a Bills season ticketholder of 19 years with seats in Section 127 going back to 2002, last week's playoff game versus the Colts marked the first home playoff game this fan had the pleasure of attending in person since December 1995. That one saw Bills beating the Dolphins 37-22 at what was then Rich Stadium.

But oh, how the times have changed for fans, when it comes to "how" you actually acquire playoff tickets today.

Back in those days, I had my seats in generally the same area of the stadium as I do today. Today's Section 127 at Bills Stadium was known back then as Section B, Aisle 5, in what was Rich Stadium before the renovations.

For season ticketholders, those playoff tickets came printed, and purchasing was either done via preorder or for customer pickup at the stadium. No emails back in those days. Non season ticketholders often purchased theirs at area bank branches, with those highly anticipated Bills ticket sales announcements often leading to long lines of anxious fans. I can vividly remember one very cold December morning waiting at 6:30 a.m. in the snow, in a seemingly forever-long line outside what was then a Marine Midland branch (today's KeyBank) at Main and Harlem in Amherst.

That prized playoff ticket in the corner end zone 14 rows up at Rich cost me a whopping \$40. It wouldn't even cover the cost of a beer/food

purchase these days.

And the process of getting a Bills playoff ticket in 2020? Well, read on.

As Bills fans are all too aware this season, in-person attendance at the stadium for the 2020 campaign was a bust. COVID-19 triggered cancellations, pauses, complete shutdowns and safety/health protocols galore, including for in-game attendance at all Bills home games. Nothing in life would be the same as before.

Season ticketholders were given the option by the Bills to have their now-suspended prepaid ticket accounts held in credit by the team, with first opportunity for any future attendance ultimately subject to the determination of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office and the New York State Health Department.

Following a very detailed in-game planning process that included the Buffalo Bills, the NFL, New York state, Erie County and others, it was determined that the Bills would be permitted to host approximately 6,700 fans for Saturday's widely anticipated playoff game.

And the bartering process was underway. Season ticketholders, numbering roughly 13,000 who opted for the Bills to hold their payments, were given first opportunity. Ticket availability was based on member seniority going back decades to the team's founding in 1960. A limited number were selected, with options to acquire tickets available in pods of two or four tickets per account.

And so, the informational email process began. "Thank you for your continued support," read the Bills email to season ticketholders on Dec. 30. "We are excited to announce that 6,772 fans will be permitted to attend our Wild Card playoff game. Below is important information regarding our playoff ticket on-sale and COVID-19 testing requirements."

And, ah, those requirements! "All playoff tickets will be sold ONLINE ONLY through Account Manager. No tickets will be sold over the phone or in person," the email read. "Playoff ticket on-sales will take place in account seniority order for Season Ticket Members that opted in. Due to limited capacity, we don't anticipate tickets being available for all Members."

"Your ticket on-sale date and time ... is based on your account seniority. Please make sure to sign in to your account prior to your date and time to ensure you have access. You can also sign in to view any

account credit you may have by clicking Account Activity from the dropdown menu. Account credits can be used toward the purchase of playoff tickets," the playoff notice continued.

So, it became time to re-familiarize myself with that account manager. Visit the Bills website, click tickets, then account manager, and start the process at your assigned time. But wait - what's your password? I typed in an older saved one. It didn't work.

Bear in mind, at my prescribed time, I was attempting to access this site with thousands of others. It soon became a game of getting bumped and rebooting, just to get started. And choosing the best broadband to use and where to log on - Explorer, Chrome or Firefox? As we all know, internet speeds vary as to your router and also your location; I soon found out my home computer system way out by the lake in Youngstown was not working. I was getting bumped almost as soon as I clicked.

So, it was off to another find another computer at another location with a newer, faster system, and a better internet connection. Once that was done, time to redo the password, get into that account manager and try to find tickets. The Bills advised me that my current seats were not available as they remain under cover. Time to scroll the stadium map, and try to do it quickly before you get bumped.

All said, I went through this process of getting bumped, bumped again and re-logging back on probably more than a dozen times over the course of an hour. Success finally! I snagged two nice playoff tickets 25 rows up in Section 141 of the corner end zone.

But not done yet. Then came the mandatory COVID-19 testing requirements. Attendees were required to successful complete and pass a specialized COVID-19 nasal/nasopharynx test performed by BioReference Laboratories under an agreement the Bills and New York state have with the NFL.

"All ticket holders must obtain a negative COVID-19 test result to attend the game," read the Bills email. "Only ticket holders who can provide proof of a NEGATIVE test via BioReference Laboratories at Bills Stadium will be allowed to attend the game. BioReference testing at Bills Stadium is the only approved testing center to obtain a COVID-19 test, results from any other testing center will not be accepted. Tests will be administered at Bills Stadium 2-3 days before the date of our first home playoff game. The Bills highly encourage you to sign up for the earliest test slot you can find."

OK, two hurdles were cleared. Tickets were successfully ordered, and I passed the COVID test. Time to get ready and do the game, right? Well, not quite. I still did not have an actual ticket or parking pass. A Bills email received late Friday advised me of the following:

"Tickets are MOBILE ONLY. Access your mobile tickets through the Bills Mobile App. For more information on mobile ticketing click. ...

"Your designated gate and entry time will be shown on your mobile tickets.

"Ticket forwarding will not be permitted. With ticket forwarding not permitted, pods will need to come to the gate together at their designated time. The identity of the person present at the gate must match the identity of the person named on the negative BioReference COVID-19 test presented before having a ticket scanned for entry. "We recommend adding your tickets to your Apple Wallet or Google Pay before arriving to Bills Stadium."

OK. This is fun. Once you get through the process, and have computer/broadband/internet success, you'll get your ticket. Friday afternoon, and still no actual mobile ticket

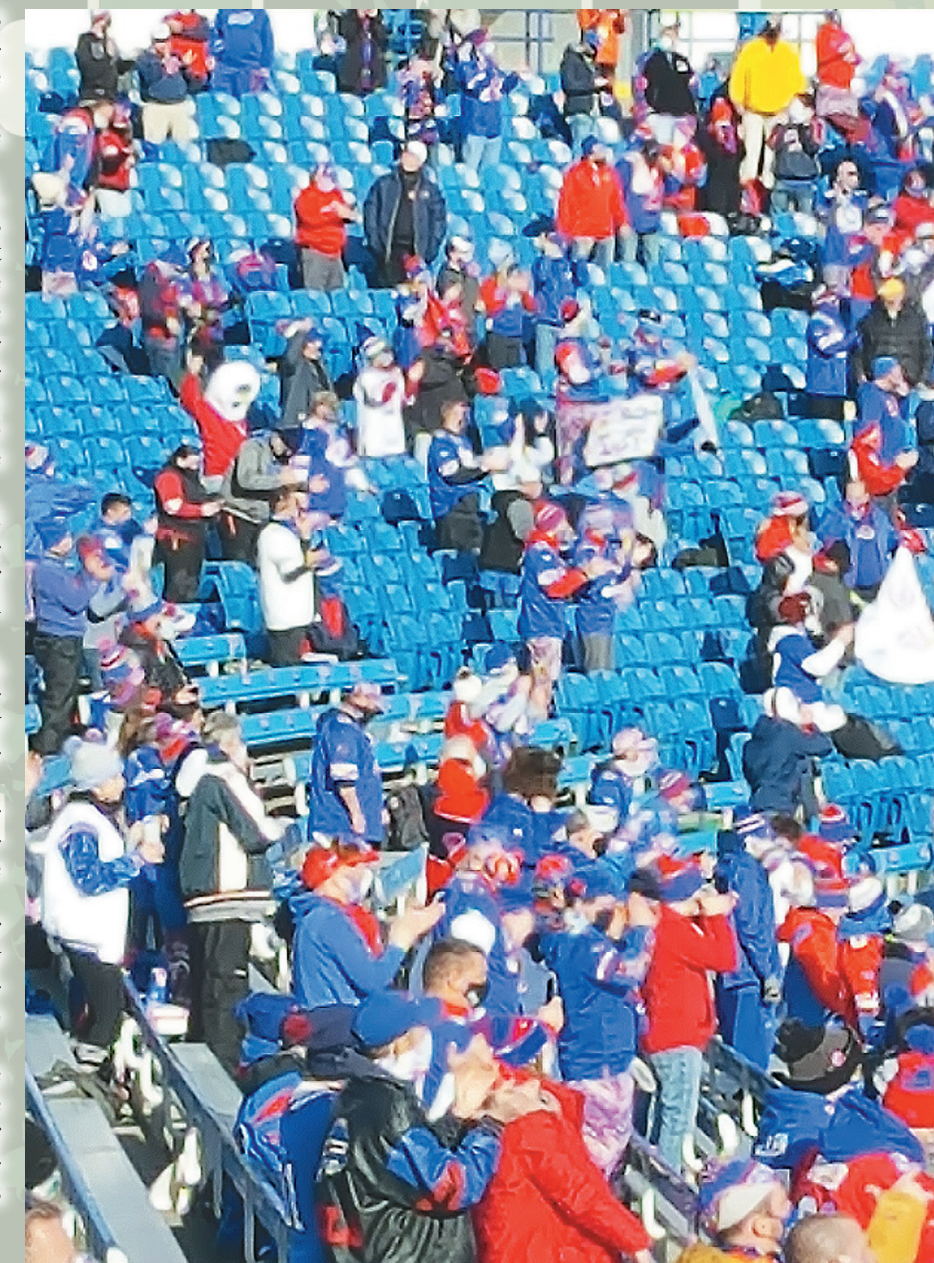
After several unsuccessful attempts, growing angst and calling the Bills in Orchard Park, I finally got it resolved. Now on to the game - but wait, no pregame tailgating. Darn.

Turns out, following some creative planning, my party did manage to find a nearby location close to Bills Stadium for some pregame gathering.

And then we got in! We parked in our authorized Bills parking location, my phone stayed charged, and the testing results and mobile ticket were accessible to Bills checkers from my phone.

Attending this game turned out to be a blast. The end zone metal seats were great, the concession stands with beer and food were open, the game was a thriller, and we all went on to enjoy the Bills first home playoff win in 25 years.

But getting there was not easy.



Cuomo: Buffalo Bills fans can attend 2nd home playoff game under pilot plan

6,700 fans will be allowed to attend second home playoff game after plan's 'successful implementation' last week

Admission contingent upon negative COVID-19 test result; contact tracing to follow

Tailgating remains prohibited

Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Monday announced that, following what his camp called the successful implementation of the pilot plan to open Bills Stadium to fans last week, Buffalo Bills fans can attend the team's second home playoff game on Saturday, Jan. 16.

Under this continued demonstration, approximately 6,700 fans will be allowed to attend the game only after first obtaining a negative COVID-19 test result and adhering to all public health precautions. Contact tracing will also be conducted after the game and tailgating remains prohibited. This plan was developed cooperatively between the Bills, the New York State Department of Health and BioReference Laboratories. The Bills host the Baltimore Ravens at 8:15 p.m. TV coverage will be on WGRZ-Channel 2 (NBC).

"It was a great joy to see the Buffalo Bills win their first home playoff game in more than two decades in front of thousands of New York fans on Saturday, and we're looking forward to extending that winning streak this week," Cuomo said. "New York's first-in-the-nation pilot plan to reopen Bills Stadium to fans went smoothly, and we're pleased to be able to extend it to next week's game. The success of our pilot plan depends on individual behavior as well as collective measures, and I urge Bills fans to stay safe and follow the rules



Buffalo Bills logo courtesy of the Buffalo Sabres

as we look to another exciting game. Go Bills!"

New York State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker said, "The Bills' play on the field earned them an opportunity to play again this weekend, and their fans behavior in the stands earned them another opportunity to watch them. We'll continue our contact tracing efforts and our work closely with the Bills throughout the week to ensure all safety compliance measures are in place for Saturday night. We're confident we'll have the same outcome, both on and off the field."

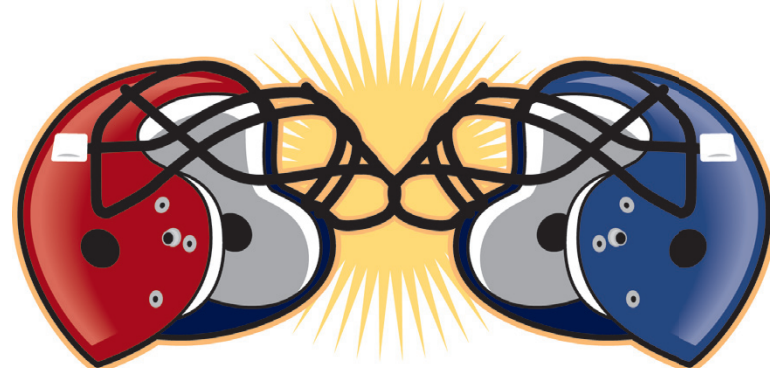
Buffalo Bills owners Kim and Terry Pegula said, "We felt the energy from our fans last Saturday at the stadium and we know our coaches and players appreciated the support on the field. We have worked with the governor, his team and BioReference

to ensure we will host fans again on Saturday night. They have all been great partners in this process. We want to thank our fans for following the safety guidelines, and remind the fans coming Saturday to please wear your mask, socially distance and follow the rules. Be safe. Be smart. Be loud!"

Jon R. Cohen, M.D., executive chairman of BioReference Laboratories, said, "BioReference is proud to continue implementing its large-scale COVID-19 screening program in order to allow fans to enjoy the Buffalo Bills in person. We thank the governor and the Bills for their partnership and look forward to another exciting game."

A press release said, "The continued success of this plan will help inform the reopening of entertainment venues across New York. Within the demonstration, team staff controls all entry and exit points to the stadium and only fans with a documented negative COVID-19 test are allowed inside. Testing is conducted in partnership with BioReference. Once inside the stadium, fans are required to wear a mask at all times and adhere to strict social distancing protocols. Fans who refuse to comply with these protocols will be removed from the stadium. Ushers will also be present throughout the stadium to ensure all fans are in compliance with the public health protocols and rules of conduct. "Tailgating remains banned under this plan and New Yorkers are reminded to avoid gatherings and parties before, during and after the game as these events are prime for deadly viral spread."

If Buffalo and the Kansas City Chiefs (hosting the Cleveland Browns on Sunday afternoon) both win, the Bills would travel to KC for the AFC Championship game. If the Bills and the Browns win, Buffalo will host the AFC Championship on Sunday, Jan. 24.



THE NIAGARA SAUSAGE CO.
Sausage Made to Order & More...
FOOTBALL SPECIAL
\$2.00 OFF Ribeye Steaks if wearing Bills attire
If Bills WIN: \$3.00 OFF NEXT WEEK
5611 Lockport Road, Town of Niagara
Call Bryan or Norm 298-4422
theniagarasausageco@aol.com

GRANDMA D'S PIZZERIA
NOW TAKING PRE-ORDERS FOR **THE BIG GAME**
LARGE PIZZA \$12.00 includes Cheese & 1 Item
5909 Creek Rd. Youngstown 219-4100
Hours: Sun. 12-9, Mon. - Closed, Tues. - Thurs. 11-9, Fri. 11-10, Sat. 3-10
Local Delivery Available Exp 1-31-21
NOW SERVING Homemade Soup

THANK YOU to Dimino Tops and their patrons
Brickyard Brewing Co.'s White Bronco is officially Lewiston's NUMBER ONE Craft Beer Brand
GO BILLS!
Brickyard Brewing Company
Lewiston, New York