

# On the Sidelines

## The Underdog

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In the final moments of the Super Bowl Sunday night, as the cameras focused in on the painful expressions of many of the Buffalo players, I could not help but think of why even the most ardent Dallas fan had to feel just a little sympathy. The Buffalo Bills, the team that must win the Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde Award for appearing so formidable in the playoffs and then continually folding in the big game, represents a sort of species that all of us can identify with in one way or another. The Bills, whatever their faults may be, represent that most favored group in American society--the underdog.

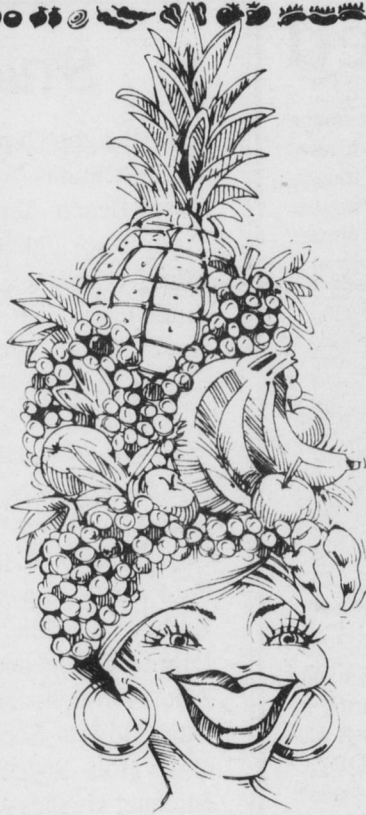
There is something so natural in the American fascination with the underdog. After all, it is easy for someone to imagine that those first settlers to the New World, who went forth in the face of immense danger and the threat of the unknown, would associate with the likes of the present-day Tampa Bay Buccaneers or Chicago Cubs. There is something so fascinating about teams that refuse to quit that we even make movies about them, as evidenced by the flick "Cool Runnings." No matter how many naysayers plague them, I think all sports fans hold out a little hope for the perpetual losers because they represent an ideal to all of us. Everyone who has ever been told that they could not do something can identify with them--they represent the will within us all.

Of course, sometimes the underdogs fulfill our every wish and, unlike the Bills, pull off the "impossible." Ever since Joe Namath

guaranteed a win over the Colts in the Super Bowl many years back, and then proceeded to win against all the odds, we have recognized that the best victory lies in the upset. In 1980, the U.S. Hockey Team became an icon for their stunning win over the U.S.S.R. In 1983, the Wolfpack of the late Jim Valvano pulled off a miraculous last-second win over the University of Houston. Finally, in 1991, Duke knocked off the daunting Rebels of UNLV and went on to win the national championship.

As this last case demonstrates, however, the role of underdog is not usually permanent. After years of making it to the Final Four and never winning a championship, Duke won it in 1991. And in 1992. Now, any sympathy they may have received as underdogs has dissipated. In fact, the tables seem to have turned completely very quickly, as was evidenced by the immense amount of support and fan appreciation that the tiny Campbell University Camels received when they drew the Duke team as opponents in the first round of the 1992 NCAA Tournament. When David becomes Goliath the support borne by pity quickly disappears.

So, the Buffalo Bills must not lose all hope. Even if they return to the Super Bowl next year, there will be many fans that will root for the Bills simply because they will likely be underdogs. This would probably be twice as true if they were to meet Dallas again. And who knows, maybe they will pull off the stunning defeat and become one of the greatest upset stories in history. Now, if this underdog effect would only work on professors grading exams . . .



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