

Journal-Press SPORTS & SCHOOL NEWS

FOOTBALL

MEMORABLE RUN

Buffalo defeats No. 3 seed Spring Lake Park; season ends in near upset over No. 2 Park Center

By Rob LaPlante
Sports Editor

A 3-7 record may not suggest a ground-breaking season, but the 2021 Buffalo football team finished one win away from becoming the first Bison squad to reach a section championship game in 12 years.

A 28-20 road defeat in the Section 6, Class 5A semifinals to No. 2 seeded Park Center ended Buffalo's strong post-season run. The playoffs started with the No. 6 Bison posting a stunning 14-9 road win Tuesday, Oct. 26 at No. 3 Spring Lake Park.

The defense accounted for both scores in the win over the Panthers. Owen Herbst's strip and score at his own three-yard line was the first of many big plays for the defense in the game.

On second and goal from the Bison five-yard line, Herbst, who wrestles in the winter, and runs track in the spring, muscled the ball out of the hands of Panther running back Brayden Comer and sprinted his way 97 yards untouched to the end zone.

"I just saw the opportunity," Herbst said. "They were trying to push it through the line. He was still up and standing, so I ripped the ball out. I saw the opportunity and just went for it."

A stunned Spring Lake Park squad, which averaged 29.3 points during its 6-2 regular season, trailed 7-0 at halftime.

Buffalo's defense forced two turnovers on downs and recovered two fumbles in the first half. What looked like another potential score for the Panthers turned into another lost possession when Noah Karels recovered a fumble midway through the second quarter at the Bison five-yard line.

"This is the defense going into the year we thought we had," said Head Coach Craig Lachowitzer. "We have a lot of guys who are really good football players on that side of the ball. We talked going into the game, that big players make big plays in big games."

Karels and Herbst are two of 25 seniors on this year's roster. Two other seniors would play big roles in the second half.

Spring Lake Park's opening drive of the second half saw them again reach the Bison 20, but on fourth and seven, Brayden Talso's pass attempt was intercepted by senior Carson Giddings for a 90-yard defensive score.

"We had a lot of guys that



Buffalo senior Antonio Bluiett (left) high fives senior teammate Carter Jackson during a 90-yard kickoff return by Bluiett for a score in the third quarter of last Saturday's 28-20 Section 6-5A playoff defeat at Park Center. (Photo by Rob LaPlante)

are senior dominated with that defense," Lachowitzer said. "They made big plays, played with a lot of grit and showed a lot of heart."

Like Herbst, Giddings is also a member of the track team during the spring. Once he picked off Talso, Herbst knew nobody was going to catch his track teammate.

"I knew he was gone when he caught it," Herbst said. "It was exciting. It was kind of that same feeling I had

when I was running down the field. At that point in my mind, I knew we were going to win the game."

Buffalo's shutout bid was spoiled when Spring Lake Park finally capitalized on its fourth trip to the red zone. Nick Ojile's two-yard rush with 8:21 left in the fourth quarter closed the gap to 14-7.

A quick three-and-out by the Bison offense gave Spring Lake Park the ball at its own 49 with 6:52 left in

regulation.

The Panthers marched the ball to the Bison eight, but turned the ball over on downs on a failed fourth-down attempt. Buffalo's offense took a safety when senior quarterback Evan Soeffker intentionally ran out of the end zone, making it 14-9 with 3.3 seconds remaining in the game.

A gutsy call to purposely allow points and kick the ball away is always something that could get second

guessed, but with no timeouts and 13 seconds left on a fourth and three, coaches felt the time was more of a nemesis for the trailing team than the score.

"We decided we weren't going to punt," Lachowitzer said. "We were going to put it in the hands of our defense and run around as long as we could to take the

Football

Continued on Page 12A

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

Buffalo wins fifth-straight section title

By Rob LaPlante
Sports Editor

Different section. Different class. Same results.

The Buffalo boys' cross country team qualified for the Class AAA state meet with a first-place score of 45 at the Section 8AAA finals last Thursday at Fox Hollow Golf Course in St. Michael.



Dave Knutsen

It marked the sixth-straight season Buffalo has qualified for the state meet. It's also the fifth-straight year they have won the section championship. The past four titles came in Section 2AA. With the sport adding a third class, Buffalo won this year's meet against some new competition.

"We're all really grateful for the opportunity to go to state," said senior James Dorado. "There's teams that will go 10-15 years without seeing a state meet, and we just have the privilege to go, repeatedly. We definitely earned it. We've been working hard."

Dorado and seniors Jared Gregoire and Jadon Boots were a big reason for Buffalo continuing its championship run. St. Michael-Albertville senior Caden Nordberg was first to the finish line in a time of 16:21.7, but the next three behind Nordberg were Gregoire (16:30.3), Boots (16:43.5), and Dorado (16:45.8).

Gregoire and Dorado were coming off personal records in which they both recorded sub-16 minute times in the Lake Conference finals. Times dropped from the conference meet, but wet and windy conditions also played a factor.

"We (Jared, James) took turns taking the lead a bit and communicating, which was a really big part of our success," Boots said. "Jared was up front the most, but he had a little bit of a stumble, and James and I took the lead. Then I told Jared to get behind me and block the wind, and he ended up coming along the side."

Unlike last year's section meet where five of the seven runners packed closely together, a substantial gap came between Buffalo's top-three finishers during Thursday's meet from the fourth and fifth-place finishers.

Boys XC

Continued on Page 14A

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

Hart leads Buffalo at section meet

Weimer, STMA earn section titles

By Rob LaPlante
Sports Editor

At one point or time throughout the season, Head Coach Andrea Carlson was missing at least one of her varsity runners for various reasons.

Despite a last-place score of 214 in last Thursday's Section 8AAA girls' cross country finals at Fox Hollow Golf Course in St. Michael, many of the faces on the Bison runners were sporting smiles afterwards.

The joy wasn't so much about individual accomplishments. It was more about having a full lineup, which included Kadence Baloun and Kaline Merges making their varsity debut in a 5k race.

"They were worried about

Girls XC

Continued on Page 13A

GIRLS TENNIS

Minnetonka sisters defeat Buffalo sisters

Lees advance, but fall to eventual state champions in quarterfinals; Skippers sweep tennis titles



Buffalo sisters, Anna (back-left) and Alaina (back-right) Lee shake hands with Minnetonka sisters, Annika (front-left) and Karina (front-right) Elvestrom following their semifinal match last Thursday at Baseline Tennis Center in Minneapolis. The Elvestroms won 6-0, 6-1 and eventually won the Class AA state doubles title the following day. (Photo by Rob LaPlante)

By Rob LaPlante
Sports Editor

Everybody wants a shot at beating the champions. Anna and Alaina Lee got their shot, only it came one day and three rounds earlier than they hoped for.

After starting last Thursday's opening round of the Class AA girls' state tennis tournament with a 6-3, 6-1 victory over Mounds View's Amanda Diao and Shae Crockarell, the sisters from Buffalo had a quarterfinal matchup against the sisters from Minnetonka, who came in seeded No. 1.

Minnetonka's Annika and Karina Elvestrom lived up to their billing with a 6-0, 6-1 win over the Lees. They would eventually go on to win the state doubles title with a 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory the following day over Rochester Century's Julia Baber and Paige Sargent.

It was the second-straight state doubles title for Annika, who teamed with this year's

Girls Tennis

Continued on Page 12A