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Linda Bogdan

This article was written by Greg D. Tranter

Linda Bogdan was the first full-time female scout in the history of the National Football League. She served 22 years in the Buffalo Bills scouting department. She was an astute judge of football talent and her ground-breaking work has opened opportunities for many other women to achieve success in various roles in professional football.



Linda was born in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan in 1948 to Janet (McGregor) Wilson and Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. She grew up in the Detroit area and graduated from Hewitt School in 1967. Hewitt is “a distinctive place for girls and young women to learn and grow.”ⁱ The school “believes that the key to a meaningful life is meaningful relationships with people and ideas over time.”ⁱⁱ Following her graduation, she matriculated to Bennett College, earning an associate degree in 1969.

Linda’s love for football began as a young child. She attended many Detroit Lions games with her father, while he was a part-owner of the team. Once he purchased the Buffalo Bills in 1959, her allegiance changed to the Bills. Linda played touch football as a child and recalled, “There were some very heavy touch football games in suburban Detroit. My father, a couple of his friends, and I’d get a couple of my friends from the neighborhood. I must have played touch football until I was almost 20.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Linda was also an avid tennis player as a child and an adult, capturing several club championships in single and doubles at Forest Hills, NY. She also enjoyed bicycling, traveling and loved her dog Millie.



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Mr. Wilson, owner of the Bills, occasionally asked Linda to do some specific scouting for the team. Her first try came in 1978 when she was living in Florida. Mr. Wilson asked her to go to the Gator Bowl to scout some players. She attended the Ohio State vs Clemson game and came away extremely impressed by a wide receiver on Clemson named Jerry Butler. She sent back a glowing report to the Bills scouting staff about Butler. At the advice of Linda, the Bills selected Butler with the 5th pick in the first round of the 1979 NFL draft. He went on to have an excellent career with Buffalo, catching 278 passes for 4,301 yards and 29 touchdowns. He was the Bills third all-time leader in receiving yardage when he retired in 1986 and is still seventh all-time.

Linda enjoyed her experiences scouting and after the Bills had back to back 2-14 seasons in 1984 and 1985, she thought she could help the team more. Reflecting on her career years later, she said, “The team was struggling. I called him (her father) and asked if I could help them get some players.”^{iv} From that question, she got more involved in the teams scouting and became a full-time scout in 1986. The first full-time female scout in pro football history.

Her scouting responsibilities included eastern collegiate games during the season, bowl games, all-star games, and scouting combine activities. After five years of scouting, she was given additional responsibilities by Ralph. On July 1, 1991 she was promoted to Corporate Vice President, responsible for long-term planning and she kept her scouting duties. For many years she was the only active female scout in pro football.

Her scouting prowess helped the Bills land some notable players, in addition to Butler, including Hall of Famers Andre Reed and Thurman Thomas, and 1991 AFC Championship Game hero Carlton Bailey. Reed was uncovered at tiny Kutztown State University. Reed was selected by the Bills in the 4th round of the 1985 Draft with the 86th pick. He went on to a Hall of Fame career and is the Bills career leader in most pass receiving categories, including receptions (941), and yards (13,095).

Thomas was more heralded coming out of Oklahoma State, but an injury in college kept him from being selected in the first round. Buffalo jumped at the chance to take him in the second round with the 40th overall selection. Thomas, also put together a Hall of Fame career, and is the Bills career leader in rushing yards with 11,938, carries with 2849, and touchdowns with 65.

Bailey was another under the radar find. The Bills selected him in the ninth round of the 1988 draft. He was the 235th player taken. Bailey was the Bills primary right inside linebacker on their first three Super Bowl teams in 1990, 1991, and 1992. He is most remembered for his play in the 1991 AFC Championship game against Denver. With the score tied at zero midway through the third quarter, the Broncos faced a second and ten



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from their own 19-yard line. John Elway's pass was tipped by Bills defensive tackle Jeff Wright. The ball popped in the air and Bailey plucked it out of the air and sprinted to the end zone for the first touchdown of the game, giving the Bills a 7-0 lead. Buffalo went on to win their second consecutive AFC Championship with a 10-7 victory.



Bogdan "was considered to be a good judge of talent after her years of watching football."^v She attended the 1988 Senior Bowl with her father and watched Thurman Thomas play well in that game. Linda said, "I just loved him."^{vi}

Linda and Ralph had a close relationship and they watched a lot of football games together. One interesting story was following a devastating loss by the Bills in New England, when the officials stole the game from Buffalo. Prior to the last play of the game Ralph turned to Linda and told her, "Look, Bledsoe is going to throw a Hail Mary, and we're going to get called for pass interference. And that's what happened. I wish I could call the stock market like that."^{vii}

Linda was promoted on May 10, 2006 to the position of Vice President/ Assistant Director of College and Pro Scouting. With these new responsibilities Linda had an integral role in the franchise's college and professional scouting departments. She worked closely with General Manager Marv Levy, and Assistant General Manager Tom Modrak.

The Bills 2007 draft, with Linda's integral involvement, secured Buffalo running back Marshawn Lynch with their first selection, linebacker Paul Posluszny in the second round, quarterback Trent Edwards in the third and safety John Wendling. In the 2008 draft the Bills netted cornerback Leodis McKelvin, tackle Demetrius Bell and wide receiver Stevie Johnson.



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Lynch is a borderline Hall of Famer with 10,413 rushing yards and 85 touchdowns. Posluszny (played 11 seasons), McKelvin (played nine seasons) and Stevie Johnson (played eight seasons with 381 receptions for 4,764 yards) all had solid NFL careers. Edwards had a promising early career, but it fizzled after he was injured in 2008.



In 2007, a tennis tournament in Rochester was started in honor of Linda, who was a big tennis enthusiast. Today it is known as the Linda Bogdan Memorial Futures Tennis Tournament played at the Tennis Club of Rochester. The tournament has been conducted annually since then. It is a week-long tournament held in Rochester and it brings aspiring college tennis players and budding professionals aiming to win part of the \$10,000 prize money and to move them forward in the USTA rankings. Also, it hopefully helps jettison some of the players to the bigger more prestigious tournaments in the future, like Wimbledon and the U.S Open.

Linda sadly left this earth on April 28, 2009 after a courageous battle with cancer at the age of 61. She was survived by Ralph, two sisters, Edith Wilson and Christy Hoffmann and her husband Robert, and her stepmother Mary Wilson.

Following Linda's death, her former tennis coach Pamela Mogul said about Linda, "I always loved coaching her as she had such great focus. She was a great inspiration and role model for me being so successful in a male dominated industry."^{viii}

Linda died prior to seeing her father enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame on August 8, 2009. In Ralph's Hall of Fame speech, he paid tribute to Linda. "He talked about going to football games with her, and how much he wished she could have been in Canton to see her dad enshrined,"^{ix} said Jerry Sullivan of the Buffalo News.



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End Notes:

ⁱ Hewitt School Website: <https://www.hewittschool.org/about>, July 7, 2020

ⁱⁱ Hewitt Scholl Website: <https://www.hewittschool.org/about>, July 7, 2020

ⁱⁱⁱ Associated Press, “Bills’ scout isn’t your ordinary Joe,” *The Times Leader* (Wilkes Barre, PA), January 31, 1993, p41

^{iv} Associated Press, “Bills’ scout isn’t your ordinary Joe,” *The Times Leader* (Wilkes Barre, PA), January 31, 1993, p41

^v Associated Press, “Bills’ scout isn’t your ordinary Joe,” *The Times Leader* (Wilkes Barre, PA), January 31, 1993, p41

^{vi} Associated Press, “Bills’ scout isn’t your ordinary Joe,” *The Times Leader* (Wilkes Barre, PA), January 31, 1993, p41

^{vii} Associated Press, “Bills Still Fuming Over Loss To Pats,” *Latrobe Bulletin* (Latrobe, PA), December 1, 1998, p11

^{viii} Letter from Pamela Mogul, May 2, 2009

^{ix} Sullivan, Jerry, “Inductions provide cause for celebration,” *Buffalo News*, August 9, 2009, pB2

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