

Common Bond

Former Bills Wide Receiver Tells Story Of Friendship At Hall Of Fame Banquet

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On Dec. 23, 1990, Don Beebe suffered what he believed might have been his greatest setback yet, breaking his leg after a collision during a late season game against the Miami Dolphins at Rich Stadium.

The Bills' third-round draft pick in the 1989 NFL draft who, at that point, had defied all the odds, was blocking Miami Dolphins cornerback Tim McKyer on a run play when linebacker John Offerdahl dove into his planted leg, missing Bills running back Thurman Thomas.

At the time, Beebe didn't know the extent of his injury, but upon moving around a little, he soon figured out what the verdict might be.



Don Beebe, former Buffalo Bills wide receiver, answers a question at Monday night's Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame induction banquet. Beebe told a story of how he formed a long-lasting friendship with Jamestown native Melissa Stanton following an injury in 1990. P-J photo by Scott Kindberg

"I kinda rolled on my back and said 'Not good,'" Beebe explained at Monday night's Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame induction banquet. "I knew it was broken."

Frank Reich, legendary Bills back-up quarterback, ran out onto the field and prayed with Beebe as he

laid on the field in pain, then proceeded to help him up. As Beebe rose to his feet, he gave a fist pump motion to the Bills' faithful fans.

"I can still hear the whole crowd, 80,000 people screaming 'Bee-be, Bee-be, Bee-be,'" he said. "It gives me goosebumps just thinking about it."

Being so early in Beebe's career, only one year removed from his NFL debut with the Bills, he found himself facing what many believed to be a career-ending injury in the midst of not being able to join his teammates on their historic journey to their first of four Super Bowl appearances.

"I knew I would be back. A lot of people doubted it, but it was a very trying time," Beebe said. "We all have trials. This was a trial for me, knowing they were going and I wasn't going to play."

Amidst what he described as a period of self-pity and a sad depression, a nurse notified Beebe that he had a visitor at the hospital where he was staying.

"(The nurse) said that there was this little 12-year-old girl who wanted to meet me and that she was a huge Beebe fan," he said.

Beebe said he was caught off guard, considering the timing of the nurse's request on behalf of the child, but found enough self-described good nature to say, "Sure, let her come on in."

Into the room rolled 12-year-old Melissa Stanton, a Jamestown native who was confined to a wheelchair due to spinal cancer. At that time, Beebe noted, Stanton had been through 12 different surgeries and had a halo over her head to hold her neck up.

"She had the biggest spirit of anyone I've ever met and still today," Beebe said.

And thus, a friendship was born.

"We just connected big time," he said.

Since that day, now nearly 26 years ago, Beebe and Stanton have remained in touch and have been the best of friends, even with Beebe, who now resides in Illinois, being so far away.

"I'm Don 'BB' to her, I'm her big buddy and we've just become close. I brought her to some games, the whole team got to know her and I took her out to the Super Bowl with her family."

With the friendship still going strong (Beebe said he receives text messages from Stanton once a month), it only seemed rather fitting that he would be at his buddy's side during a recent time of need.

"Two days ago, I got a phone call," Beebe said. "She's 37 now and had suffered a heart attack."

Seeing as how Beebe was in Jamestown to speak at the banquet Monday night, he had planned on bringing Stanton and her mother to the event to discuss their story.

"I was going to bring her and introduce her and talk about our relationship, specifically that of never giving up."

Even though Stanton was not able to make it to the banquet, Beebe made it a priority, despite a busy day in the Southern Tier, to visit his longtime friend.

"I was over at the hospital (yesterday) and spent a couple hours visiting with her, and she still has that same spirit. It's just unbelievable," he said. "It's gravitating. So I brought her a stuffed dog named Buddy. We hit it off like we hadn't missed a beat. It was tough to leave her."

Beebe and Stanton might be two unlikely friends, but their collective willingness to fight, keep fighting, and persevere is what makes Buffalo and Western New York the most unique football community, according to Beebe.

"Girls like Melissa Stanton are exactly what Western New York is all about," said Beebe. "People love to be around you and they don't want anything. Usually, people that are around you want something. Not in Western New York - they just want to be with you and that's what family is. Western New York people are unique people. I enjoy coming back here."

While the Buffalo Bills don't have a Lombardi Trophy to show for, they do have one, if not the most, committed fan base in the National Football League. Don Beebe's friendship with Melissa Stanton not only is an exemplification of such community, but is its personification.