

# Lakewood Native Made Radio Call On Bengals' TD That Ended Buffalo Drought

Jan 2, 2018

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*Lakewood native and Cincinnati Bengals radio play-by-play man Dan Hoard, right, called the game-winning touchdown pass Sunday night by quarterback Andy Dalton, left, that helped propel the Buffalo Bills into the playoffs. Submitted photo*

When Dan Hoard was growing up in Lakewood in the 1970s, he was a huge fan of the Buffalo Bills.

Heck, his bedroom was a shrine to O.J. Simpson, and he remembers vividly when his father took him and his step-brother to Rich Stadium in 1973 for a Monday night game. That's the evening when the future Hall-of-Fame running back, playing in just his seventh game that season, surpassed 1,000 yards on his way to 2,003.

"The Buffalo Bills meant everything to me," Hoard said Monday afternoon.

They even helped shape his career path, even though he was, at the time, only 10 years old.

"I was already turning down the sound on the TV and practicing (play-by-play) into a tape recorder," he said. "I was the ... voice of the Bills, Braves and Sabres. It's just nobody but my family realized it."

Fast forward 45 years to Sunday night. Hoard, the play-by-play voice of the Cincinnati Bengals since 2011, stood inside the radio booth at M&T Bank Stadium with his broadcast partner, Dave Lapham, as the Bengals, trailing Baltimore, 27-24, in the closing minutes, took possession.

To say the odds were stacked against them would be an understatement.

All the Ravens needed to do was get one defensive stop, and they would advance to the playoffs and the Bills — winners in Miami, but needing a Baltimore loss to get in — would be sitting home for the 18th straight year.

But out of nowhere Bengals quarterback Andy Dalton put together a magnificent 90-yard drive, capped by his 49-yard touchdown pass on fourth-and-12 to Tyler Boyd with 44 seconds left to give Cincinnati a 31-27 victory.

The Bills were in.

Finally.

Fittingly, Hoard, the former rabid Bills' fan and a 2016 Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame inductee, made the call on the Bengals' Radio Network.

"I was really happy about the game-winning touchdown, mostly from the Bengals' perspective," he said. "I will say that down the stretch of the broadcast, I was referencing the Bills quite a bit, having grown up in Western New York and having rooted for the Bills as a kid. I was actually aware of what the drought meant.

"Immediately after the touchdown, I said, 'It's silent in Baltimore and it's pandemonium in Buffalo.'"

Bills' fans haven't stopped celebrating, something Hoard wishes for the Cincinnati faithful, who have endured their share of heartache over the years as well and have not seen a postseason victory since 1991.

"Buffalo had the longest streak of not going to the playoffs, but the Bengals still have the longest streak of not winning a playoff game," Hoard said. "The last time they went (to the postseason), it was that infamous game against the Steelers (in 2015) when the Bengals had the game won. They had the lead and intercepted a pass with (a minute and a half) left. All they had to do was run out the clock and they fumbled on the first play."

There was enough uncertainty on New Year's Eve to wonder if the Bills were again going to be denied a meaningful game in January, but, finally, the football gods worked in their favor.

Now it's on to Jacksonville.

Moving forward, Hoard will be concentrating solely on broadcasting the games of the University of Cincinnati men's basketball team, which is ranked 19th in the country in the latest Associated Press Top 25 poll. The Bearcats are talented — Hoard believes they're as good as any team that Coach Mick Cronin has had — so maybe the Southwestern Central School graduate will have an extended broadcast journey this winter and into spring.

At least for this week, though, I bet a small part of Hoard will be pulling for the NFL team he grew up rooting for.