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CONLAN MAINTAINED HIS POISE AS HE AWAITED CALL FROM NFL

FREWSBURG - We bring you to a small, white house a couple of doors removed from Route 62.

Stuffed inside the small, white house is a five-gallon pot of coffee. A few boxes of doughnuts. Four television cameras. Twelve media representatives. A football player named Shane Conlan. His brother, his sister, his parents, his girlfriend. And several thick-necked college football players, associates of Conlan's at Penn State.

Conlan will, on this Tuesday morning, await the determination of his professional football future. The others will watch him wait.

The waiting. The watching.

Conlan, the pride of Frewsburg High ('82), has waited a lifetime for the news the television in the downstairs rec room will bring.

Yet Conlan, like the eye of a storm, is calm. It is those around him who fret.

"I couldn't sleep at all last night," says Kay Conlan, Shane's mother. "None of us slept. And I've been nervous for weeks...Would you like more coffee? Please help yourself."

Dan Conlan, Shane's father, is less talkative. But his face is as red as a man who has just climbed three flights of stairs, and he clenches his hands together from time to time.

Downstairs, in the rec room, the TV cameras on tripods surround the white chair near the TV, Conlan's designated throne.

It is 8:08. The broadcast has begun. There are 18 people in the rec room. None of them is named Shane Conlan.

"Shane," calls Kay Conlan. "Will you please come down here."

Conlan, dressed in jeans and a yellow sweatshirt, reluctantly steps into the fray.

Cameras focus. Lights glare.

Conlan lasts about 20 minutes in the designated chair, under the lights and cameras, before vacating for the relative safety of the couch against the wall.

The Colts, picking second, take Cornelius Bennett.

Seldom farther than 10 feet from Conlan throughout the vigil is his girlfriend, Caroline Wesel. She's a pretty, petite young woman who, later that morning, will be approached by a man

with a microphone.

"So," he asks, "when are you two getting married?"

Startled by the bluntness of the question, she hesitates. But quickly regains her footing.

"Well," she says, "I'd like to graduate first."

The wall of the dark-paneled room is lined with plaques and photos from Conlan's days at Penn State. One, framed, is the typewritten scholarship offer from Penn State. At the bottom is a handwritten P.S. "Shane, I look forward to meeting you --Joe."

A TV cameraman in the corner of the room leans against the wall, knocking one of the plaques to the floor.

The count of bodies in the room is up to 22. It's Media 12, Family and Friends 20.

Pete Roselle announces the Bills have traded their pick, the third, to Houston.

Conlan, weary of the ceremony, walks upstairs.

A few reporters follow. An ESPN announcer mentions Conlan and the Bills. Identifying him as "A local boy from Jamestown."

The Frewsburgians in the room groan.

Someone brings in a box of NFL caps, one for each team. No matter who picks him, Conlan will have the appropriate headgear for the photos.

Minutes later, with Green Bay about to pick fourth, ESPN's Bob Ley says, "I see Conlan going to the Packers."

Conlan is going, at this moment, to move his car out of the driveway. A minute later, as the draft grinds on, Conlan and a couple of his Penn State buddies shoot baskets at the rim nailed over the garage door.

A few photographers move in for snapshots.

Conlan is beginning to show the strain of 40 minutes as the only goldfish in the bowl.

He throws up a final shot, turns to the photographers, and says, "I wish you guys would stop following me."

St. Louis, picking sixth, takes quarterback Kelly Stouffer.

Someone asks Kay Conlan if she ever imagined her son in the position?

"Oh no. He was such a little kid. And with 88 kids in his graduation class, in a town this small? How could we imagine he would go to the pros?"

Conlan, wary of the horde downstairs, settles onto the living room couch with fellow linebacker Trey Bauer.

This is his day, his moment. But he will get his draft news second hand, via the shouts of those assembled in front of the tv downstairs.

Detroit, picking seventh, selects defensive end Reggie Rogers.

Minutes later, the phone rings.

All conversations stop.

Conlan walks into the kitchen and picks up the receiver.

Marv Levy? Bill Polian?

He listens for a moment.

"No. Call back in an hour."

He slams the phone down.

"My brother Michael."

Oh.

A moment later, a squeal from downstairs.

Caroline.

"What?" yells Conlan from the living room couch. "What is she yelling about? Is it the Bills?"

It's the Bills.

After 83 minutes, the suspense is over.

An instant later the phone rings.

As Conlan steps into the kitchen to answer, the stairs resound with the thunder of a climbing posse of media.

By the time he picks up the receiver, he's surrounded.

Lights. Action. Camera.

"Hello. Speaking."

The crowd tenses.

"Hey, could you call back in a little bit. Thanks."

A radio station.

Twice more the phone rings. Twice more Conlan reaches for the receiver, camera lights flick on, microphones are raised in readiness.

Twice more the alarm is false.

Finally, Conlan cites Press Stater Mark Finlay as a designated phone answerer.

Two calls later, Finlay hands the phone to Conlan.

Shane, say hello to Marv.

The transcript: "Ok. Thank you very much. Sure. Ok. Ok. All right, coach. Ok. Yeah, I remember. All righty. Thanks coach."

In the living room, Dan Conlan is interviewed. His eyes, behind wire-rimmed glasses, look a little damp.

The men with cameras and notepads close in around Shane.

"Yes, everything worked out," he says. "I'm thrilled to be with the Bills. I hope they're thrilled to have me."

What will he bring to the Bills?

"I have decent speed," he says. "And I give everything I've got. I never give up."

Was he nervous?

"Not really. No. The only thing was watching my mother and girlfriend get nervous. That's what drove me crazy, watching them."

Kay Conlan is asked about hometown reaction to Shane's success.

"It's a small hamlet," she says. "We're very supportive of each other down here."

Dan Conlan, in the living room, is telling a reporter he doesn't have Bills' season tickets. But he intends to get some.

"You have to understand," he says. "Our last four years have been college football. After Saturdays, we're pretty tired on Sunday."

The Conlans are happy. Shane is a Bill. Buffalo. Not Green Bay. Not Detroit. Buffalo. Cose to home.

Caroline Wesel, of Pittsburgh, is also happy.

"This is close," she says. "He'll only be a couple of hours away."

Things have worked out. All around.

In the background, one hears the pop of a champagne cork.

Glasses are passed around, and filled. The waiting is over.

The celebration begins.