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Conlan One of Six Bills Named to Pro Bowl

ORCHARD PARK – Shane Conlan was in a Buffalo Bills team meeting at Rich Stadium Wednesday when teammate Cornelius Bennett had the sudden urge to make an announcement.

“We were in the meeting and ‘Biscuit’ was screaming,” Conlan recalled. “He said, ‘We both made it.’”

Defensive Coordinator Walt Corey later confirmed that the two prized second-year linebackers – along with four other teammates – had been chosen to the Pro Bowl by a vote of their peers.

The game will be played Jan. 29 in Honolulu.

Teammates joining Conlan and Bennett on the AFC Pro Bowl squad were center Kent Hull, defensive end Bruce Smith, nose-tackle Fred Smerlas and place-kicker Scott Norwood. Linebacker Darryl Talley was chosen as an alternate.

To Conlan, the consensus Defensive Rookie of the Year and an alternate to the Pro Bowl after last season, his selection was an honor.

“I wasn’t too concerned about the press and stuff as long as the other team respected me and obviously they did or they wouldn’t have voted for me,” he said. “It’s a great feeling.”

Corey wasn’t surprised at Conlan’s selection.

“He’s played Pro Bowl linebacker,” Corey said. “He deserved it. It’s not because he played for the Bills. I don’t know who played better.

“He’s well-known around the league. When I’ve gone out to the scouting combines, a lot of people talk about Shane Conlan. They talk about Cornelius Bennett and they talk about Bruce Smith, but Shane Conlan’s name is always on the tips of a lot of people’s tongues.”

Despite suffering a foot injury three weeks ago that has kept him out of two entire games and most of a third, the Frewsburg native is still the Bill’s third-leading tackler with 84. He also has an interception and 1 ½ sacks.

Joining Conlan at inside linebacker on the AFC team are Miami's John Offerdahl and Kansas City's Dino Hackett.

Conlan wasn't sure if his foot injury would work against him in the balloting.

"I wasn't really concerned about it," he said. "My No. 1 goal was to get my foot well and to get into the playoffs.

"I think my goal was more team-oriented. I just wanted to play the best I could play and if it happened, it happened. I thought if it didn't, I wouldn't have been upset with it. But right now, I'm really happy."

Bennett was joined at outside linebacker by New England's Andre Tippett and Cleveland's Clay Matthews.

The former University of Alabama star is second on the team in tackles with 97, has 9 ½ sacks, two interceptions, three forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries.

Hull, who quietly went about his job without much notoriety, is the lone Buffalo offensive player to make the Pro Bowl team. As is his style, Hull tried to deflect praise away from his individual accomplishment.

"It's kind of hard to pick out individuals on an offensive line," he said. "I don't think that's quite fair because if there's one unit on the whole football team, it's on the offensive line."

Another first-timer, Norwood connected on 32 of 37 field goal attempts, and set several Bills records.

"I didn't think it was in the bag or anything like that," he said. "There are a number of good kickers out there in the AFC."

Smerlas, who many thought to be washed up just a few seasons ago, will be making his fifth Pro Bowl appearance, a Buffalo mark that ties him with O.J. Simpson.

"I had a good year and the scheme really helped me out," he said. "I was happy. It's been a long time and a lot of stuff has been written... I wanted to make five."

The other interior linemen headed for the Pro Bowl is Tim Krumrie.

Smith, the Most Valuable Player in last year's Pro Bowl, leads the Bills in sacks with 10 and has made 53 tackles, despite missing the first four games while serving a suspension for violating the NFL's substance abuse policy.

The other defensive ends on the AFC team are Lee Williams of San Diego and Houston's Ray Childress.