

Hello everyone

Tonight I've been given the impossible task of summarizing 50 years of Buffalo Rugby

No pressure at all.

After spending some time thinking about what I would say I began to realize my thoughts were not about scores or wins and losses or league championships but instead of people and times and places. Each response to the announcement of the 50<sup>th</sup> triggered a whole new set of memories.

It began to dawn on me that what was happening this weekend was pretty special. How could we, a group often accused of being irresponsible, selfish, reckless, child like and fool hardy, among other less flattering things, pull off a 4 day gathering of similar types stretching from 1966 to 2016 ?

So I decided to concentrate on what is SPECIAL about our club and its history. Things that no other club can lay claim to. Some I think are strange, some are interesting, and some are honorable.

So here we go

The Strange

The Buffalo Rugby Club is the

- only rugby team to give CLUES to away games - not directions
- only team to have their clubhouse CUT DOWN and another adopted full grown 20 yards away
- only team to practice in a horse stable followed by a visit to a bar to wash down the droppings.
- the only team to play in torn Hawaiian shirts on ESPN TV
- the only team which can claim as members Tom Surwill, Stan Swisher, Doug Miller, Alex Nadiak, Anthony Gorrell

- the only team to have killed Santa Claus
- the only mens rugby team to go with their coach for ice cream after winning a playoff game.
- The only team to drink bloody marys at Kellys Korner after the turkey trot for 40 straight years.
- The only team to have a Wall of Fame but no wall. And to have a member of its Wall of Fame also enshrined in the Buffalo Music Hall of Fame.
- the only team whose first man of the year was a woman

#### Among the Interesting things

- Probably the only rugby team to
  - have played in 5 different unions? Rugby East, Upstate, Empire, Allegheny and Niagara
  - have played in a foreign league for four years.
  - The only USA team to win a league championship in Canada. It happened in 1974 in the Ontario Intermediate Championship against York University - and we're honored to have the LOSING scrum half with us here tonight. (Sorry Steve - but I can never pass that one up)
  - only USA team to place multiple members on a foreign all star team.
  - only USA team to have an American picked for the Ontario Provincial Select Side
  - only team to regularly practice in an NFL field house
  - its hard to prove but probably among the few teams to boast of three members with children who are Olympians.
  - Only team to annually host a 7s rugby tournament in the middle of winter and actually get teams to pay to do it.
  - Only team to have had SEVEN past members playing in a USA Super League Championship Final [ for Old Blue and Aspen in the 1997 ]
  - only team to meet actor and ex-rugby player Richard Harris backstage after a performance at the Sheas Buffalo Theater and present him with an Old Boys rugby jersey
  - only team to volunteer 5 straight years for Habitat for Humanity to tear out

houses

- Only club beside the Saranac Lake Mountaineers to have played in all but one Can Am tournament
- only team to always compete as a club and not as an all star team in the top level at the Can Am Tournament
- and the last CLUB Team to win the top level of the Can Am Tournament houses.

PAUSE

on the honorable side

We are not the oldest or the richest but - We've been a club for 50 years ! Not many clubs in the USA can say that !

- Others have come and gone, merged or split . . .

Syracuse Rogues, Syracuse Harlequins, Schenectady Reds, Windhover, Watertown, Finger Lake Vikings, Batavia Creamers, Fredonia Blackhorse, Beacon Hill, OMEX, Sud Americano, Cleveland Blues, Cleveland Grays, Cleveland Eastern Suburbs, Kitchener and Georgetown, Ontario

. . . but Buffalo has been a constant force we've never been without leadership, never faltered with numbers or competitiveness in 50 years

think about this . . .

- we have a contact list of over 550 members which starts with the man most responsible for starting the club – Jack Krajewski – he's here tonight
- we've had continuous coaching for 22 years
- we've played on the same field for 45 years in an internationally recognized Olmsted Park
- We have a team photo from 1968 picturing 16 young men. We are still in contact with 8 of them and four of them are here tonight
- AND here tonight we have 5 of the original members of the club.

How many clubs can match that !

PAUSE

In the last few weeks I've received many replies to the question "what is special about Buffalo Rugby". Here are quotes from responses I received from two of the most truly unique and remarkable people in our club.

Alex Nadiak sent me this, "I think our rugby camaraderie culture is as strong as any club in the USA. Anyone who has played here and elsewhere comments on how they miss that part of Buffalo. We have a unique balance of competitiveness, socialness and brotherhood compared to other clubs. This has been told to me by all of the funny talkers we've had".

And from Tom Surwill, 'Remember the movie Stand by Me? At the end Richard Dreyfuss says something like "friends go in and out of your life like busboys in a restaurant". For me ... this is not so. My core friends today are mostly "brothers" from the Buffalo Rugby Club. In fact, most of my closest friends are rugby brothers from the 70s and 80s ... and some from later years. This close bond, this friendship, was forged in part from the 80 minute fight on the pitch on Saturdays. It was truly more of a fight in the 70s and 80s when the game was new to America, less skilled than today and much more brutal in every phase. But the game today is 100% better.

So, the "fight on Saturdays" morphed into us bonding at weddings, funerals, baptisms, graduations, birthday parties, tours, road trips, holiday parties, Thursday night selections and our love and respect for each other and The Club itself.

Most Clubs don't have this glue ... this bond. We do!

I hope to be buried in a Buffalo Rugby Club jersey ... or T-shirt .... But not anytime soon!

Cheers! Tom"

PAUSE

And finally some personal thoughts,

Its impossible to know how our lives would have turned out had we made different choices along the way. Maybe we would have had a better life had we turned left instead of right at some street corner years ago.

But it is hard for me to imagine a better life than the one I've had partly because of my choice to be involved with rugby. My lifelong friends are rugby players. I've traveled with my wife Margaret to the Cliffs of Mohr and the Cape of Good Hope because of rugby. My children have watched lions in South Africa and climbed mountains in Montana because of my rugby associations. We've been received with open arms in Auckland New Zealand and Bath, England because of friendships created 40 years ago through rugby. And now life has gone full circle. My grown children who enjoyed their times with the children of team mates at the Wildwood in Lake Placid now bring their children.

PAUSE

It is not coincidence that we are all here tonight.

You all made the same choice I did years ago.

How special is it - that we have one more chance - to be surrounded by people - who share the same affection - for the times in their lives - when they played AND LIVED - the best game on earth.

Thanks everyone