



UPI ARCHIVES JAN. 7, 1990

Bills end season on controversial note

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. -- It was a fitting ending for the Buffalo Bills.

The Bills, a team surrounded by controversy and player bickering during the 1989 season, wrapped up the campaign Saturday with one player second-guessing quarterback Jim Kelly on a last-second play that could have pulled out a victory over the Cleveland Browns in the AFC divisional playoff game in Cleveland.

With nine seconds left, Kelly fired a pass to running back **Ronnie Harmon** in the left corner of the end zone. The ball went off the hands of the outstretched **Harmon** and the Browns intercepted Kelly one play later, sealing their 34-30 victory.

Harmon has not talked to the media for the last two seasons, but running back Thurman Thomas said **Harmon** returned to the huddle and told Kelly the ball could have been thrown more quickly.

'**Ronnie Harmon** said 'if he had looked at me a little bit quicker' he would have scored because he was wide open,' Thomas said. Thomas also noted **Harmon** said, 'Jim looked a little bit too long the other way, but by the time he looked (**Harmon**) was almost out of the end zone.'

Kelly would not comment on the matter because he hasn't spoken to the media since settling a controversy with Thomas four weeks ago after the running back openly criticized Kelly.

A film room fight between assistant coaches Nick Nicolau and Tom Bresnahan early in the season also led to increased tension, but Thomas believes the Browns loss may have worked in bringing the team closer.

'I think we grew up as a team in this game,' Thomas said.

If Kelly and Thomas still harbor ill feelings, it wasn't noticeable on the field as Kelly hit on 28 of 54 passes for 405 yards and four touchdowns. Thomas was his favorite target, grabbing 13 passes for 150 yards, two for scores.

'Jim played a great game,' said Thomas, who dropped three of Kelly's passes but recovered to tie Kellen Winslow's record of 13 catches in a playoff game. 'I was just nervous. Really, all day I had a hard time catching the ball.'

Kelly was the target of media and fan criticism throughout the season, especially after he was critical of offensive lineman Howard Ballard, claiming the 300-pounder missed a block when he suffered a separated shoulder that sidelined him for three weeks.

The Bills brass, namely Coach Marv Levy and General Manager Bill Polian, were unwavering in their support of Kelly.

'Jim did not have to prove anything to me,' Levy said. 'I thought he performed extremely well. He showed a lot of heart -- the same heart he has had.'

'A lot of people have questioned whether Jim Kelly was a good-enough quarterback to be a championship quarterback in this league,' Polian said. 'Question answered.'