SPORTS SATURDAY

The Happy By ROBERT J. SUMMERS

Before placing bets, get facts on favorites

AVORITES. EVERY RACE has one. They drive the Happy Handicapper and a lot of other horseplayers nuts. Favorites. Can't live with them. Can't live without them.

You load up on the obvious choice in the race, and he breaks stride at the gate. You find a juicy long shot with a good chance and he gets nipped at the wire by, of course, the favor-

Favorites. One of the first race track statistics any budding nag picker learns is the universal constant that year in and year out the favorites win a little more than 33 percent of all the races.

Such a seductive number, that 33 percent. It means that simply by looking at the tote board and seeing which horse has the most money wagered on it — and nothing else you can pick one winner in three. Looks like an easy game, doesn't it? Imagine what you could do if you studied a little bit and learned something.

In his eternal quest for the key to the pot of gold, the Happy Handicapper spent some time last week poring over various aspects of the favorites in the harness races at Buffalo Raceway's winter meet.

His studies covered 416 races over the 36 racing dates through last Saturday. Here is what he found:

You can't bet them all: Even though the favorites have been coming in at a higherthan-normal clip (40.6 percent for the season, 42.7 percent in January), the payoffs on the people's choices are so low that it is folly to wager indiscriminately on them to win. A \$2 bet on each favorite would have resulted in a total loss of \$61.50.

Reigning reinsmen: As might be expected, the meet's two top dash-winning drivers, Rod Laframboise and Ed McNeight Jr., are made the favorites most often. But they don't appear to be the best of wagers when favored. They lose with favorites more often than they win and their favorites don't perform much differently than the general average. Laframboise has won with 21 of 55 favorites (.382 win percentage) while McNeight has won with 23 of 56 (.411).

Exactamaster: If you're playing an exacta and Patsy C. Rapone is driving the favorite, do not leave him out. Rapone has been first or second with 22 of 30 favorites (.733). Of the five busiest drivers of favorites, he's tops at finishing in the top two.

■ Better bets: If you're going to bet some serious money on a favorite, you can do it with a high degree of confidence if the animal is driven by Dan Guindon, Daniel Yetman, Betsy Brown, Bruce Tubin, or Richie Blaun. Of the 15 drivers who have handled the most favorites, they are the only ones with win percentages of .650 or higher. Blaun and Tubin have each won with six of eight favorites (.750); Brown is 7 for 10 (.700); Yetman is 9 for 13 (.692); Guindon is 13 of 20 (.650).

■ Betsy's beauties: Five of Brown's seven winning favorites have been horses she trains herself. They were Blasting Cap (\$4.20), GE's Belkan (\$6 and \$5.40), Ore's Truly (\$5.20), and Avon Kristan (\$3.60).

■ Hot nights: A \$2 win bet on each favorite would have resulted in a winning night 15 times. The best night for favorite players was Dec. 15, when eight of 12 favorites won. A \$2 bet on each favorite would have netted a profit of \$16.

Heavy bets: A little more than a fifth of the favorites are so heavily bet that they would pay less than \$4 for a \$2 wager. They are especially risky propositions since they win more often than favorites in general, but they pay measly prices. During the winter meet, there have been 90 of these "odds-on" favorites and 52 of them (.578) have won at prices ranging from \$2.60 to \$3.80.

Cold touch: Don Rothfuss has been death on favorites. He's been sent postward at the lowest odds 15 times, but has won only once while coming in second seven times. He's 0 for 3 with odds-on horses. Other drivers who have had little success with favorites include Chris Maser (0 for 5), Bob Bompczyk (0 for 4) and Charlie Bacon (0 for 3).

Odds-on authorities: Tubin has been the closest thing to money in the bank when it comes to odds-on favorites. He has driven five heavily bet choices and won with four of them. He has won twice with Deputy Chief (\$3 each time) as well as Aurora Hanover (\$3.40) and Imso Striking (\$3.60). McNeight and Laframboise each have won with 7 of 11 odds-on choices.

Cold choice: There has to be a favorite every race, but some favorites are hotter than others. A total of 66 favorites have gone off at odds of 2-1 or higher, and 12 have won. The biggest-paying favorite was Shaving Mug, which paid \$8 for Jack Flanigen Jan. 6.

Post haste: Most odds-on favorites come out of post positions No. 1 or 2, but they have won just under 60 percent of the time. Ironically, the time to run to the window to bet an odds-on favorite is when it is leaving from posts No. 4 and beyond. Odds-on choices from the outer posts have won 18 of 21 races (.857).

Lonely boy: Only three horses have been favored from way out in Post No. 8. Only one of them won. That was Fred Haslip's Handsome Boy, who paid \$3.60 on Dec. 15.

Yes, man. Yetman. Yetman, a provisional driver, is proving to be a master of both favorites (he's 9 for 13 on public choices) but also on long shots. His other winners have included Scissor Wizzor (\$82.60), Lukes Wee Lad (\$59.60) and Don Henry (\$29.40).

Out cold: A \$2 win bet on each favorite would have resulted in a losing night at the races 21 times. The worst night for favorite players was Jan. 4, when only one of 11 public choices came in. It was Laframboise's Tidewater Duke, who paid \$4 and ended a 10-race streak of losing favorites.

In playoff loss, Miller initially dropped the call college basketball will be left out in the rector, said the station's airing of the

UPER BOWL SUNDAY had at least one surprise for many Buffalo viewers who watched CBS' pregame show.

If you watched the Buffalo Bills 34-30 playoff loss to Cleveland on television, you might not have heard WBEN-AM radio play-by-play man Van Miller initially blow the call on Ronnie Harmon's dropped pass.

Miller said "touchdown" but quickly corrected himself.

"It was right in his hands, I thought he had it," Miller told On the Air. "Maybe it was wishful thinking, but I immediately said 'no, he dropped it.' It is something that happens to a lot of (announcers).

"I do recall saying afterward that Ronnie Harmon may live with this one the rest of his life."

Could the same thing be said of

Miller? "I certainly wasn't embarrassed by

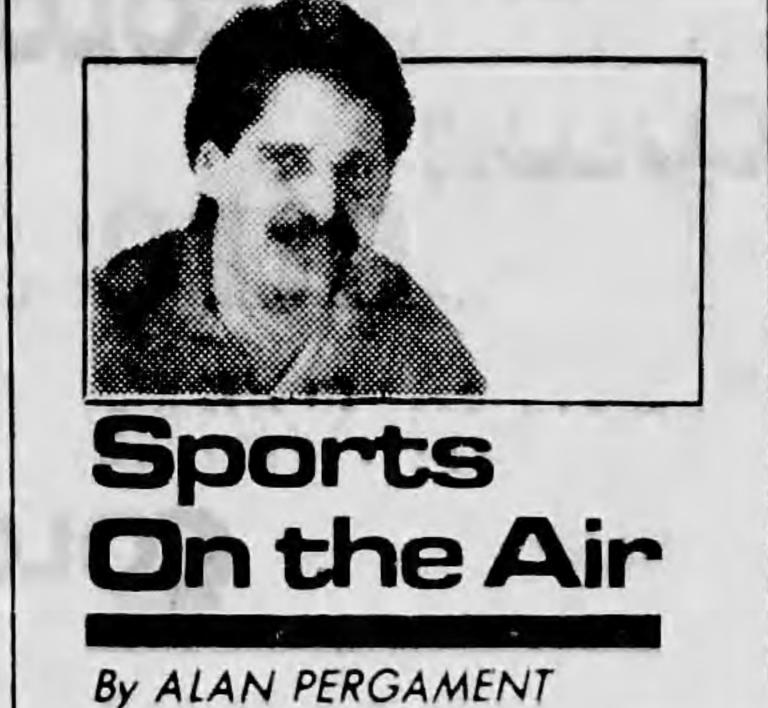
it," said Miller. He was surprised that CBS ran his call of the play during the pregame

"I find it interesting that they would use my call when they had a CBS team doing the game," said Miller. "I'm flattered. Jim Nantz was there doing the game with Pat Haden. Don't you find it interesting they picked the Buffalo

I suspect CBS chose Miller's call because it emphasized the disappointment felt by Bills fans after Harmon's

TCI of Buffalo is carrying the college basketball game Channel 4 is ignoring today — the Big East battle between Georgetown and St. John's. The game will air on cable channel 33 at noon.

TCI recently has missed some



chances to carry games on which local affiliates have passed.

Dennis Sprole, TCI's director of marketing, said the system looks for pre-emptions from the Erie, Pa., TV Guide and also relies on information supplied by local stations.

He said TCI missed Channel 4's Jan. 21 pre-emption of the Los Angeles Lakers-Detroit game because WIVB's original schedule indicated it was going to join the game after 30 minutes.

TCI is able to carry pre-empted games if they are carried by Erie network affiliates or Adelphia cable through Rochester. If they aren't on Erie or Rochester affiliates, they won't be on cable. If Ch. 4, Ch. 2 and Ch. 7 pre-empt different games at the same time, then TCI only has the technical equipment to carry one.

And weekend sports pre-emptions are now becoming routine. Channel 2 is passing on the 4 p.m. DePaul-UCLA game today (it will be on TCI Channel 33) and SportsWorld's Sunday coverage of the Pizza Hut All-Star Softball Game. Channel 7 is passing on ABC's Sunday college basketball double-header. TCI plans to carry NBC's SportsWorld Sunday (Channel 33.) ABC's cold on TCI because it already has a 4 p.m. scheduled game on Channel 33.

TCI's addition of the Prime Network has increased the staggering amount of college basketball already available through cable. Prime is a sports fan's delight. Its coverage of the old timers league in Florida will help baseball fans get through the winter.

Sportscasters never die. They just go to a sports fan's version of heaven —

Becky Dixon (formerly ABC) and Terry Chick (formerly CNN) Thursday signed on the new Mizlou Sports News Network, the 24-hour sports news and information service. It may be available on Adelphia cable by year's end.

Among other sportscasters and sports celebrities acting as commentators and anchors on SNN are Karie Ross (ESPN), Larry Csonka, Mickey Mantle, Vic Braden, Harvey Pack and Gordie Howe.

SNN, which premieres with 5 million possible viewers, will concentrate on coverage of breaking sports news and scores and will not have any event programming.

Its chief competitors would appear to be ESPN's SportsCenter, CNN Headline Sports and 900 sports num-

Channel 4 won't be carrying the first 30 minutes of CBS' Feb. 18 coverage of the Daytona 500. It doesn't want to pre-empt its real estate show, which has a 52-week contract. TCI of Buffalo plans to carry the first half hour. Channel 4 will carry the balance of CBS' race coverage, which ends at 3:30 p.m.

Ron Gates, Channel 4's program di-

JAMES P. McCOY/Buffalo News

Feb. 11 Busch Clash from Daytona will move the real estate show back to 12:45 p.m. and the station didn't want to move the show two weeks in a row,

Gates said the first half hour of the Daytona 500 received the same rating last year as the real estate show. The

race audience built as it neared conclu-"Viewers may miss a few laps (of Daytona), but they will see 90 percent

of the race," said Gates.

Rick Jeanneret's WBEN-AM call of the Buffalo Sabres-Quebec Nordiques game Wednesday belongs in the Hall of Fame. The Boxing Hall of Fame, that is. The excitable Jeanneret could probably make a Gerry Cooney fight sound exciting. His call of Jeff Parker's battle with Darin Kimble was so passionate that it sounded like an endorsement and glorification of the uglier side of the sport. Despite the laments from purists about fighting in hockey, I suspect Jeanneret's attitude is embraced by the majority of fans.

Exhibit A illustrating the problems of a man paid by a professional team also acting as a reporter: In a story about National Hockey League salaries, Ted Darling said on WBEN that lowpaid stars Pierre Turgeon of the Sabres and Brett Hull of St. Louis could expect to see their salaries go up to at least \$200,000 next season.

At least \$200,000? If Darling can sign Turgeon for a puny \$200,000 next season, he should forget about being the voice of the Sabres and be put in charge of player contracts. He might be able to save enough money to build a new hockey rink.

WEEKEND

Packed house

A sellout crowd is expected Sundaywhen Pat LaFontaine, one of the National Hockey League's leading scorers, leads the New York Islanders into Buffalo for a 7:05 p.m. game against the Sabres at Memorial Auditorium.

LaFontaine, second in the NHL in goals with 44, has been the key ingredient to the Islanders' success thus far. The Islanders are tied with New Jersey for the lead in the Patrick Division.

Take your pick — and roll!

Local college basketball fans will have plenty to choose from this weekend as Buffalo State, Canisius and Niagara all play at home.

Canisius and Niagara are part of a Niagara Falls Convention and Civic Center double-header tonight, with the Golden Griffins playing Holy Cross at and the Purple Eagles battling Nick Macarchuk's Fordham Rams at 9.

The Buffalo State Bengals, ranked No. 1 in the nation in Division III, host Plattsburgh at 8 p.m. today in the Houston Gym. In women's action today, two of the

hottest teams in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference square off in the Koessler Athletic Center (2 p.m.) when Canisius battles Holy Cross. Entering this week, the Lady Griffs (16-2) had a 10-game winning streak, while Holy Cross (10-8) had won five straight. All-America candidate Alisa Robin-

son leads the Lady Griffs with a 22.3 scoring average. Kris Shields leads Holy Cross, aver-

aging 14.3 points and 8.2 rebounds.

High school calendar

Two of the area's top high school girls basketball teams meet at 11:30 a.m. today at D'Youville College when Holy Angels plays undefeated Niagara

Niagara Falls (12-0) has been No. 1 in the Western New York Coaches Poll all season, while Holy Angels (11-2) is ranked third.

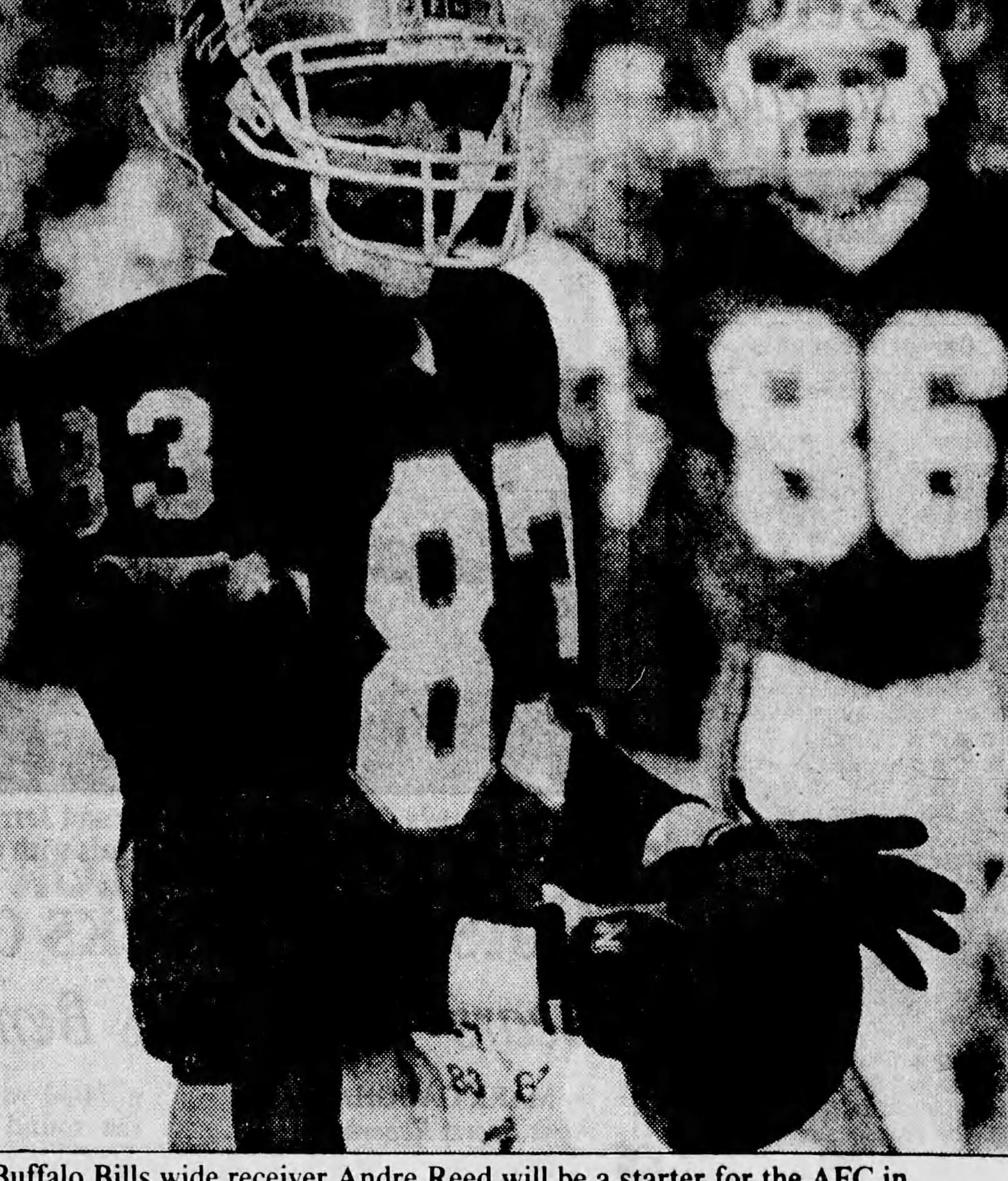
Also, Timon and St. Joe's basketball alumni will play a double-header tonight at St. Joe's. Players from the 1950s and '60s will play at 7, with teams from the '70s and '80s taking the court at 8. ... The finals of the Lewiston-Porter All Sports Booster Club's 10th annual wrestling tournament will be held at 7 p.m. today. ... Hamburg will host its second annual diving invitational at 2 p.m. today.

Lucky \$9,000

The big number at Buffalo Raceway tonight is \$9,000.

That's the purse in the feature race, the final of the Winterfest Series for fillies and mares.

The eight-horse pace features Aurora Hanover, who has won two preliminary races, plus Antiquity and Bando



Buffalo Bills wide receiver Andre Reed will be a starter for the AFC in Sunday's Pro Bowl (8 p.m., ESPN).

Scarlet, also winners of earlier legs.

The Hamburg track's Saturday night Pick-6 Jackpot is also up to \$9,000. Every fan gets a free crack at the money for picking the winners of the third through eighth races.

First race is 7:30 p.m. Matinee racing continues Sunday at 1:30 p.m.

'Check' it out

at Montreal.

THINGS TO VIEW

The Buffalo Sabres play a key Ad-

The Sabres, in second place a point

ams Division game at 8 tonight (Ch.

49) against the Canadiens in the Forum

behind the Boston Bruins and six

ahead of the third-place Canadiens, are

coming off home-and-home victories

torium will be on local cable stations.

over the Quebec Nordiques.

The last hurrah

chance to watch NFL football with live coverage of Sunday night's Pro Bowl game from Honolulu (8 p.m.).

Of the four quarterbacks voted into the Pro Bowl, only Warren Moon of Houston will actually play. Joe Montana, Boomer Esiason and Don Majkowski elected not to play.

Beckoned were Washington's Mark Rypien, the Los Angeles Rams' Jim Everett, and Seattle's Dave Krieg. John Elway was a replacement for Cincinnati's Esiason, who is ailing with rib and toe injuries, but he pulled out.

Majkowski, a Depew native who listed personal reasons for pulling out, was replaced earlier by Philadelphia's Randall Cunningham.

Five Bills players — Bruce Smith, Shane Conlan, Andre Reed, Thurman Thomas and Kent Hull will play for the

WNY stars Sunday night's game against the

New York Islanders at Memorial Audi-Two former Western New York high school basketball standouts go head-tohead Sunday when Keith Robinson (Grover Cleveland) leads Notre Dame Ch. 5). ESPN will give diehard fans one last against Christian Laettner (Nichols)

Robinson, a senior from Buffalo, scored a game-high 23 points Tuesday

and No. 5 Duke (4 p.m., Ch. 2).

in a 97-79 victory over Dayton. Laettner, a sophomore from Angola, is the Blue Devils' second-leading scorer (16.9) and leading rebounder (9.3).

In other college basketball action this weekend, North Carolina St. plays at No. 12 UNLV (2 p.m. today, Ch. 2); No. 20 Loyola Marymount is at No. 14 LSU (2 p.m. today, Ch. 4); Seton Hall is at Boston College (8 p.m. today, WOR); and Wyoming is at Colorado St. (11:30 p.m. today, ESPN).

He delivers

Karl "The Mailman" Malone usually comes up big in important games for Utah, so the power forward should be in top form Sunday when the Jazz battle the defending-champion Detroit Pistons (1 p.m., Ch. 4).

Malone, who scored 61 points last Friday night against Milwaukee, is second in the league in scoring, averaging 31.2 points per game. The Pistons are led by the backcourt duo of Isiah Thomas and Joe Dumars.

Other televised games Sunday include: the Atlanta Hawks at the Denver Nuggets (4 p.m., TBS) and the New Jersey Nets at the Los Angeles Lakers (10:30 p.m., WOR).

On shores of the Pacific

Many of the top players on the PGA Tour will be out to conquer the 6,799yard par-72 Pebble Beach Golf Links in Pebble Beach, Calif., host to this weekend's AT&T National Pro-Am. Ch. 4 will have live coverage of the final two rounds (4 p.m. today and 3:30 p.m.

Mark O'Meara, the defending champion who also won in 1985, will be among those competing for the \$180,000 first prize. Jack Nicklaus, whose last of three victories here was in 1973, is making his first start on the PGA Tour this season. Nicklaus, coming off a strong showing in the Seniors Skins Game last week in Hawaii, where he earned \$140,000, is eligible for both the regular and senior tours this year. His goal is a victory on each circuit.

ESPN will have live coverage of the Senior Tour's Royal Caribbean Classic from Key Biscayne, Fla. (6 p.m. today and Sunday).

Best of the rest

ESPN will cover the last two singles matches in the Davis Cup tie between the United States and Mexico (3:30 p.m. today, 3 p.m. Sunday). ... After nearly 41 years of riding, jockey Bill Shoemaker takes his last ride today (4:30 p.m., Ch. 7) at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia, Calif. ... Mario Lemieux leads the Pittsburgh Penguins against the Toronto Maple Leafs today (8 p.m.,

- DENNIS DANHEISER

TODAY

2 PM 2 College Basketball: North Carolina State at Nevada-Las Vegas.

2 PM (2) College Basketball: Loyola Marymount at Louisiana State. Forward Bo Kimble, the nation's leading scorer, stars for Loyola. Guard Chris Jackson is the top player for LSU of the Southeastern Conference.

3 PM D Bowling: Quaker State Open. Final round. From Grand Prairie, Texas. 3:30 PM ESPN Tennis: Davis Cup, First Round: Mexico vs. United States. From Carlsbad, Calif. Doubles match.

4 PM @ Golf: AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, Third Round. From Pebble Beach, Calif. Greg Norman, Mark Calcavecchia and defending champion Mark O'Meara head the field at the 50th annual tournament.

4:30 PM Wide World of Sports: Anthology will include last race of jockey Willie Shoemaker in the \$100,000 Legend's Last Ride from Santa Anita.

8 PM @ NHL Hockey: Buffalo Sabres at

Montreal Canadiens.

8 PM (5) NHL Hockey: Pittsburgh Penguins at Toronto Maple Leafs.

8 PM WOR College Basketball: Seton Hall at Boston College.

8 PM In 10 College Basketball: Temple at Rhode Island.

11:30 PM ESPN College Basketball: Wyoming at Colorado State.

SUNDAY

1 PM @ NBA Basketball: Utah Jazz at Detroit Pistons. Forward Karl Malone leads Utah into the Palace of Auburn Hills to take on guard Isiah Thomas and the defending

NBA-champion Pistons. 1 PM ESPN Track & Field: Mobil One

Invitational. From Fairfax, Va. 2:35 PM TBS Auto Racing: The Sun-Bank 24 at Daytona. Coverage of the 24hour race's conclusion. From the Daytona

(Fla.) International Speedway.

3 PM ESPN Tennis: Davis Cup, First Round: Mexico vs. United States. From Carlsbad, Calif. Third and fourth singles matches. 3:30 PM (2) Golf: AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, Final Round. From Pebble Beach, Calif. 4 PM @ College Basketball: Notre Dame

at Duke. 4 PM TBS NBA Basketball: Atlanta Hawks at Denver Nuggets.

4:30 PM In 10 TCl 33 AN 3 College Basketball: West Virginia at Rutgers.

7 PM In 10 AN3 NHL Hockey: New York Islanders at Buffalo Sabres. 8 PM ESPN NFL Football: AFC/NFC Pro Bowl. From Aloha Stadium in Honolulu. Ros-

ters include linebackers Lawrence Taylor (Giants) and Mike Singletary (Chicago), NFL rushing leader Christian Okoye (Chiefs) and wide receiver Andre Reed (Buffalo). 🖵 10:30 PM WOR NBA Basketball: New

Jersey Nets at Los Angeles Lakers.

MONDAY 7:30 PM ESPN College Basketball: Seton

Hall at Syracuse. 9:30 PM ESPN College Basketball: Pur-

due at Northwestern.

Midnight ESPN College Basketball: UC-Santa Barbara at Santa Clara.