

10 things to know about new FC Buffalo coach Frank Butcher



Frank Butcher, head coach of Grand Island's boys team, has recently been named head coach of FC Buffalo. (JT Tompkins)

- Buffalo News story by [Ben Tsujimoto](#) - Published Mon, Feb 27, 2017

It's been two weeks since [Frank Butcher was named FC Buffalo's head coach](#), and the new boss admits he has a lot to learn before the National Premier League Soccer season kicks off in early May.

Butcher, the current Grand Island High School coach who's taken his team to two straight sectional titles and trips to the state tournament, spent two years as an assistant coach for the University at Buffalo men before guiding teams at Clarence, Maryvale and Sweet Home. He's spent the last seven years coaching the Vikings, including six with the varsity program.

The new FC Buffalo head coach recently caught up with BN Soccer in a wide-ranging phone call. Here are 10 things we learned from the conversation:

1) Butcher was caught off-guard by FC Buffalo's interest: When [Brendan Murphy left FC Buffalo for the Rochester Rhinos](#), Butcher assumed he wasn't in the Wolves' plans.



Frank Butcher addresses his Grand Island team. (Aaron Bobeck Photography)

"I never thought in a hundred years that someone would go with a high school coach, just being away from it and not that close to the league," Butcher said.

Butcher received an email from FC Buffalo owner and general manager Nick Mendola a few weeks after Murphy's departure asking to chat - the Grand Island head coach again figured Mendola merely wanted his advice on prospective candidates.

Butcher remembered discussing his philosophy on team-building with Mendola at past All-Western New York high school soccer banquets, so as he made the phone call to the FC Buffalo owner, his personal interest in the job was piqued.

When Mendola offered him the position, Butcher had had enough time to consider the opportunity - and he leaped at it.

2) His role as a "managing" head coach: The planned structure for FC Buffalo's coaching ranks is a clean break from the previous regime. Murphy and Bob Roach were fully engaged in leading training sessions and managing game days, taking on several roles.

With the new staff - which includes former players Casey Derkacz and John Grabowski as assistants - Mendola wants his coaches to specialize in specific roles, not only to emphasize individual strengths, but to give the new manager a greater perspective.

"It's not like I'm there to oversee [the assistants], but what I've gotten good at the last couple years is keeping everyone happy and making sure people understand their roles and why they're important. It's almost like an overseer.

"At Grand Island I have Matt [Waddington] around and my JV coaches around, and I'm kind of smoothing things over. I'll run practices a lot, but it's not all the time. Nick [Mendola] had approached it to me that that's what we're looking at - we want to be all on the same page. I love that idea where I can sit back and watch what's going on, try to get a feel of what's going on and then get into conversations about what we should be doing tactically, things we should be doing differently."

3) His involvement in building the team: In his [interview with Niagara Gazette's Derek Wangler](#), Butcher explained how the new FC Buffalo staff was committed to assembling a team of local players - whether they represent local colleges like the University at Buffalo or Canisius, or are former Western New York high school players returning home for the summer from their college programs.

Because of their college coaching connections, Derkacz, an assistant (now associate head coach) with the women's program at UB who played for the Bulls' men as well as Penn State, and Grabowski, a Fredonia graduate who's assisted at Fredonia and coached Erie Community College, will make the most of their networks. For Butcher, it's a little different.

"I'm taking the younger guys approach, guys just out of high school or just finishing up their high school year, trying to build a stronger base Buffalo-wise to try to get them in the fold, even if they're not going to contribute a ton yet, but hopefully in the future we end up using those guys," he said. "We're building more of a reason for the fans to come out."



Frank Butcher, middle, has been named FC Buffalo's new head coach. Casey Derkacz, left, and John Grabowski, right, are his assistants. (via FC Buffalo)

4) What Butcher thought of years past when FC Buffalo veered away from local talent: Aside from veterans Kendell McFayden and Chris Walter, and youngsters Kieran Toland and Isaiah Barrett, the Wolves' active roster comprised mostly out-of-town players last summer. [Two starters came from Hartwick College](#), two more apiece from LIU-Brooklyn and Albany, and then one each from Evansville, Rider, Louisville and Robert Morris.

The implication, then, was that a roster focused on Buffalo ties was inadequate to compete at the NPSL level. When asked how he felt about that sentiment, Butcher was diplomatic. "Sometimes you've got guys like Liam (Callahan), sometimes the guys that you want aren't necessarily going to be able to come back, whether they've got other commitments over the summer. Maybe the opportunities weren't there or the connections weren't there," he speculated. "That's why I want to get in with those younger guys, get them in so they [believe] this is a great program and in the future they'll want to stick around or come back instead of staying wherever they're going to college."

5) On his playing philosophy: With Grand Island's roster boasting an embarrassment of riches, the Vikings scored 131 goals in 23 games last year, including a whopping 16 games of five or more goals. While the talent discrepancy between GI and its competition is part of the reason for the absurd goal total, the high-scoring results reflect Butcher's preferred style.

"I love an attacking style," Butcher admitted. "It's going to depend on which guys we get in [to FC Buffalo]; I've changed formations over the years, but ideally I want to be an aggressive team that goes to the goal. There are great 1-0 games, but I'd much rather win 5-3 than 1-0. "I want to be attacking, I want to take risks and push forward. That can completely change with the guys we get committed, because I do want to win. I want to be exciting for the fans and exciting for me to watch, too."



Grand Island celebrates a goal during the Far West Regionals. (James P. McCoy/Buffalo News)

6) On his sideline demeanor: As far as how Butcher handles himself on the sidelines, don't expect a big departure from Murphy, whose 6'6 frame housed a professional, poised demeanor. "I think players will often times, at least at the high school level, take on the demeanor of their coach," the two-time reigning Section VI Coach of the Year said.

"I try to take on as calm a demeanor as possible, so that if things aren't going right, we don't get too worked up or out of control. If they see me losing control, I think that leads to them being that way. I make sure that we worry about what we can take care of - don't let referees bother you and we just play our game."



Former FC Buffalo head coach Brendan Murphy, background in blue, spent four seasons as the Wolves' head coach. (Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News)

7) On how he hopes to acclimate: The early stages of the season will be the most difficult for Butcher, as the awkward delay of various schools' graduations heavily affects when players arrive home for the summer. April and the first two weeks of May are usually a whirlwind of confusion for any NPSL coach. Will a focus on local players ease the problems created by this issue? Maybe.

"I told John and Casey that I'm going to lean on them a lot at the beginning - they've played in the league, they've watched it a lot more closely than I have. I've been watching videos as much as I can on YouTube, but you can't get the speed of play by watching those videos," Butcher explained.

"I know I've got a lot ahead of me - I've reached out to Murph [Brendan Murphy] as well to get his opinion about what I should look for and what I should watch out for. Big shoes to fill, both literally and figuratively. "I'm hoping I can translate that success from high school. With the guys that we've got a pretty good idea are coming in, I think we're going to be a pretty good team."



Casey Derkacz got to know Frank Butcher better through the UB alumni game. (via UB)

8) The new head coach previously coached his two assistants: Buffalo is a small, tightly-knit soccer community. Odds are high that if you pick three people to coach, they'll have some level of familiarity with each other. Naturally, Butcher coached both Derkacz, then 10 years old, and Grabowski (12 years old) as youth players for now-defunct Buffalo Premier Soccer Club.

"I've also playing against them in the BDSL throughout the years," Butcher added. "I've gotten to know Casey through the alumni game at UB, because the guys and the girls do the alumni game at the same time. Johnny, more recently I've dealt with him a lot trying to get guys to go to his program [at ECC]."

9) On his favorite EPL team: Several of Buffalo's die-hard soccer fans are members of both [The Situation Room](#), FC Buffalo's supporters group, as well as the [Buffalo Gooners](#), the city's Arsenal supporters. A handful of them expressed interest, via Twitter, in Butcher's English Premier League affiliation.

"To be honest with you, I don't really have a side yet," Butcher admitted. "With my (four) kids, I'm always gone in the mornings when most of the EPL games are being played. I don't really root for one team or another at this point. I don't watch enough to put my heart or soul into one team."

10) How his hiring affects SoHo FC: Butcher's Buffalo & District Soccer League team, SoHo FC, [took the Amherst Sharpshooters to penalty kicks](#) in last year's championship game. Although the preliminary FC Buffalo schedule does not appear to conflict too often with Sunday league soccer, Butcher's availability will be at risk for this coming BDSL season.

"I missed about half the games last year, so they've been carrying on without me for a while now," he said, with a laugh. "As I get older and less and less effective - some would say that I can't get less effective than I've been in the past - my role shrinks year after year after year. They'll be just fine without me."

BONUS NOTE: Frank Butcher's younger brother, Steve, remains UB's all-time leading scorer, played professionally with the Buffalo Blizzard and excelled on the U.S. men's futsal national team.