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**[Bengals enter national rankings](#)**

By Brandon Schlager Niagara Gazette

Niagara Gazette — BUFFALO – Until this weekend, the biggest kick of Nate Benoit's career had come in a 2009 matchup against Williamsville South.

The former Grand Island kicker's 42-yard field goal clinched the 23-20 win for the Vikings in a waterlogged Section VI Class A quarterfinals matchup.

Who would have thought, three years later, that momentous kick would pale in comparison to an extra point; a chip shot — a kick Benoit could probably make in his sleep 100 times over.

On Saturday, trailing 6-0 with 1:35 to play in a game against the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Buffalo State, Benoit's present team, drove 75 yards to score a touchdown and tie the nation's top-ranked program with three seconds on the scoreboard.

All the Bengals needed to complete an improbable upset of the national powerhouse, which had won the past three Division III championships, was an extra point. Benoit said, "No sweat."

"I was pretty confident at that point," Benoit said. "I knew if I thought about it too much I would get nervous, so I just told myself I had to kick it, the same way I've done a thousand times. I was so excited just to get out there and kick."

Earlier in the game, Benoit missed two field goals — a pair of 38-yarders in the first and third quarters — that would have rendered the Bengals' improbable comeback and Benoit's final extra point meaningless.

But Buffalo State's defense did its best to take the pressure off its kicker, holding the Warhawks, consistently among the nation's top rushing offenses, to just 132 yards on 43 carries and 311 yards of total offense.

Benoit said the kick, with due respect to the crowning moment of his high school career, has become by far his greatest highlight.

"It's not even close," Benoit said. "Back then, that was for me. This kick was for my team – I couldn't let them down. I was so excited just kick it, because I knew it would mean my team just beat the No. 1 team in the nation."

The Warhawks have not only won the past three Stagg Bowl titles, they've competed in the championship game each of the past seven seasons, becoming one of the most dominant Division III programs in recent history.

Buffalo State's 7-6 win shocked the country and has subsequently catapulted the program back into national relevance. The Bengals are ranked No. 19 in the latest D3Football.com poll and No. 24 in this week's American Football Coaches Association national poll for the first time since 2000.

"As soon as we saw that extra point go through, we all kind of lost it," Kyle Shreve, junior offensive lineman and member of North Tonawanda's 2009 Class AA state championship team, said. "This win means so much to us and so much for the program. There isn't one person out there outside of this team — including Whitewater — who thought we could win this game. It's huge."

"I've been lucky enough to have experienced a number of tremendous victories over the years," Jerry Boyes, Bengals head coach for the better part of two decades and Tonawanda resident, said. "Overall, for the program, it's certainly the top victory in our history and probably the best I've been a part of."

While it's hard to imagine a bigger accomplishment for the 2-1 Bengals, there are still seven games to be played before the team can truly justify the win. Buffalo State will host Alfred University for its first taste of Empire 8 conference football Saturday at 12:30 p.m.

Senior offensive lineman Dom Fraterrigo, a 2009 graduate of Kenmore East, said this is just the beginning of the team's run, with many important games still to be played.

"Obviously the win is so great for Buffalo State football," Fraterrigo said. "We accomplished something – it's the biggest win in school history. But we have Alfred U coming up this weekend and we're going to take it one game at a time from here."