

TRENT EDWARDS THE NFL'S LONE ARMENIAN

Trent Edwards is gearing up to lead the Buffalo Bills back to respectability. Heading into the 2010 season with a fresh start and a new outlook, he also has his heart set on leapfrogging himself into the upper echelon of signal callers in the National Football League. Fittingly, the Bills quarterback is a quarter-Armenian.

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As Trent Edwards looks into the lens of the camera, he's more than ready for his close-up, both as an Armenian-American man and as a promising field general playing quarterback for the Buffalo Bills.

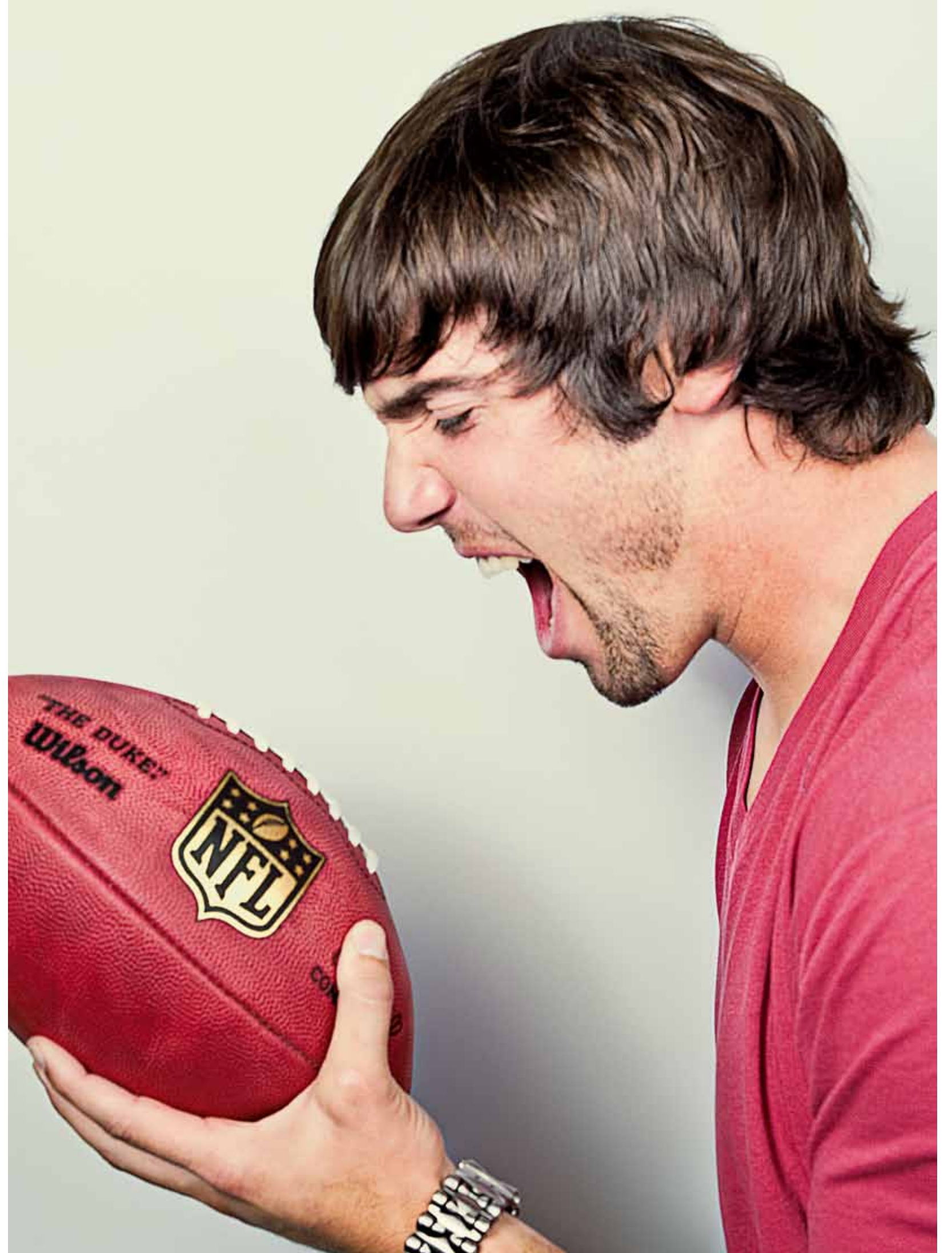
Entering his fourth season in the National Football League, he's giddy to take this once-proud franchise out of the doldrums of the league. He has been at this standstill ever since he was drafted in 2007 by a team that is now in a playoff drought running into its eleventh year. Heading into the final season of his rookie contract, Edwards is intent on taking the burden on his brawny shoulders to bring the Bills back to a level that resulted in four consecutive Super Bowl appearances in the 1990s. His injury-marred career has taken away from the brief flashes of excellence he has displayed, one being the 4-0 start to the 2008 campaign before

he was hit by the first of two career concussions. Edwards and his 14-16 career record as a starter have not gotten a fair shake in Buffalo, whose coaching staff and offensive playbooks have flown by faster than a December day's breeze in Orchard Park. Compared to the team's offensive mainstays of Hall of Famers Jim Kelly, Thurman Thomas and wide receiver Andre Reed, Edwards' supporting cast has been consistently inconsistent. Going into 2010, he will be playing for his third head coach in Chan Gabley and fourth offensive coordinator. Despite the instability and to the chagrin of Kelly, the Hall of Fame Bills quarterback who at times has been critical of Edwards, he still has accumulated the highest career completion percentage mark in a Bills uniform at 61.3 percent. Talking casually with the über-polite Edwards, aside from his grown out Justin Bieber meets Beatles mop hairdo and sprawling build, there's nothing about the charismatic 26-year-old

that draws unwarranted attention – which is a fusion of his relaxed California upbringing and the teachings of his grandfather, the late Benjamin Suren Morjig.

"I'm not the guy that's going to sit here and make excuses. I'm not going to say that I wish I had more guys around me in Buffalo. I'm one of those guys that will play with the hand that I'm dealt," he says, even though he's taken the brunt of the blame for numerous problems beyond his control. "Even with all the offensive systems we've been through, we have guys on the team I firmly believe that can get the job done." Edwards' freshly polished optimism and confidence levitated to an all-time high during this past offseason when the Bills passed on big name quarterbacks through the draft, free agency and trades, essentially naming Edwards "their guy." In a quarterback-driven league, it was the ultimate statement of commitment. "Everyone talked about the thing between me and Trent and the bottom line is he didn't have an offensive line last year with all the injuries, and he had a system that I totally thought stunk," Kelly said over the summer. "It's a new start; not many people get a third opportunity to show what they can or cannot do. He's a good kid and he works hard. He's got the ability, but I hope he gets in a system and has some healthy guys in front of him. It's unfair to judge someone when a guy has an offensive scheme that I was mind-boggled that they stayed with." ▶

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Playing in Buffalo, a Westside New York subsidiary when it comes to the media capital of the world and the N.Y. Jets and Giants, Edwards has been scrutinized for his the team's offensive inefficiency. Combine that with the franchises losing culture since the turn of the century, a stingy owner in Ralph Wilson and unfathomably losing four consecutive Super Bowls from 1991-1994, Trent has had plenty of angst to deal with from the fans in Buffalo.

"I like Trent a lot as a quarterback. He's got terrific potential. Often times, young quarterbacks get drafted to teams that are rebuilding and it takes time to get to a winning level. Buffalo has again begun the process of rebuilding," Steve Mariucci, the former head coach of the San Francisco 49ers and Detroit Lions and a current analyst for the NFL Network, told *Yerevan* magazine. Mariucci knows a thing or two about quarterbacks. He mentored and coached Brett Favre into the prime of his illustrious career in Green Bay. Edwards knows that in order to mirror the greats of yesterday and today, the team first needs to get in sync.

"If you ask someone like Drew Brees, whose offense is so successful, he's going to say that it starts up front with the offensive line. The game of football is all about trust and that's why they won the Super Bowl. Unfortunately, you can't play the game without the five guys blocking for you up front," he laughs.

His chuckle is more of frustration than a light-hearted jab as a futile offensive line has led to scars of distress. Last season was all too forgettable with Edwards, as a decimated Bills front five led to a concussion and ankle injury, cutting his season in half to just eight games. This year, a developing three-headed monster of C.J. Spiller, Marshawn Lynch and Fred Jackson will be shouldering the load in the backfield. An open offense that is to be implemented by Gailey is a reason of confidence for the Bills, who ranked 30th in total offense last year with all-pro wide receiver Terrell Owens, who has since packed his baggage to Cincinnati. (See page 49, "The Two Minute Drill.")

"He's got to prove to be a keeper; a guy who can stay healthy, play and win in this league," says Mariucci. "He's a smart, tough guy who has good size and arm strength. He's gone through some growing pains. But, that will only benefit him. He has great work ethic and football means a lot to him. It's a matter of him having the opportunities."

Compared to the gloom this time a year ago, when the team fired their offensive coordinator a week before the start of the season and unfathomably implemented a no-huddle offense without the proper tools, Edwards sees light in the dim Orchard Park skies and the heavily

revamped AFC east division, which aside from veteran Tom Brady, features three young quarterbacks as starters.

"I am preparing to have a big season, regardless if it's a contract year or not. I'm still going to work just as hard, if not harder. I'm hoping that the hand I am getting dealt this season is one that's positive and one that'll allow me to be successful, stay healthy and have a great season, and, who knows after that."

Take a three-step drop back and you can find where Edwards' cool and mature demeanor comes from: his family. Whether it was learning a firm, manly handshake or being modest and self-effacing, Trent says that his grandfather Ben shaped him into the man he has become today.

"I am preparing to have a big season, regardless if it's a contract year or not...At the end of the day, I get to work and do what I love for a living, a job that only 32 people in the world have the chance of doing."

"My grandfather had the greatest influence on me in my life. I am very proud of who I am and my Armenian heritage," he says. "I have a mature mentality. That's the way I was raised, to be a humble and confident individual. It's been engrained in me until this day to be very respectful and I am very conscientious about leaving a lasting impression on people."

Ben passed away in 2001 of a stroke and never got to see Trent evolve into the quarterback he would become for Stanford, the university of which he was a starter for their track meets throughout the 1980s. Made possible by his background and love for track, Morjig co-founded the Armenian Summer Olympics, games Trent vividly recalled participating in his adolescence.

Trent's uncle, Steve Morjig, or Stepan as his Godson in Armenia calls him, has made sure football/Trent fever reaches Armenia as well. "Don't be surprised if you see a whole bunch of Buffalo Bills fans in Armenia," he quipped, saying that he sends hats, shirts and other team apparel to his family there.

Before football, it was volleyball, baseball and basketball for Trent as his father made sure his only son would cheer for the "right" teams, those being the Los Angeles Dodgers and Lakers. Although having two historic San Francisco Bay Area teams to root for in the 49ers and Raiders, Trent was never big on football until high school.

Edwards credits his transition to the sport to his high school junior varsity coach, Charlie Wedemeyer. The courageous Los Gatos High School (Calif.) coach battled Lou Gehrig's disease (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) for more than 30 years before succumbing to it this past June at the age of 64. Trent, along with Mariucci, was a speaker at Wedemeyer's funeral and last season, took part in "Trent's Touchdowns for ALS," a program that went in support to numerous free services and programs to people with ALS. Unable to speak or walk, Wedemeyer both transformed and inspired Edwards to a newly-found talent and drive for the game by coaching with sign language and signals through his wife Lucy.

He graduated from Los Gatos in 2001 with an undefeated record in his junior and senior seasons, he was the consensus No. 1 quarterback recruit in the country by most major scouting organizations and publications.

Electing to stay close to home, in four seasons as a Stanford Cardinal, he started 31 games, threw for 36 touchdowns, and by the time the double major graduated with degrees in political science and sociology, he had solidified his statistical acumen alongside former school greats John Elway and Jim Plunkett.

"I never thought Trent would get past high school football – but he made himself a football player and a quarterback. Anything he puts his mind to, he'll end up doing," says his father, Andy Edwards. "I see him as a loving individual and value him as a great son first rather than an athlete."

Trent agrees with the sentiment. "My family and friends come first, then football after that." Nicely put by a dignified guy whose character will last longer than any football career.

"He's highly regarded as a young man in our community and in the Bay Area," says Mariucci, who lives in Monte Sereno, a football throw away from Los Gatos. "He represents his family very well and we are all rooting for him. He's got what it takes and can play on my team anytime. All he needs is another opportunity to prove himself."

For Trent Edwards, that opportunity is now. ▶

Info

Trent Edwards is one of the faces of the Buffalo Bills organization. He is also the face of football for Armenians in the NFL. Edwards is the only current NFL player who has confirmed Armenian heritage. In the sport, he follows the likes of legendary Notre Dame head football coach Ara Parseghian, current head coach of the University of Washington Steve Sarkisian and Gary Danielson (Tanielian), the lead college football analyst for CBS and a former 13-year league veteran at quarterback. Other notable players among the hundreds who have played college and professional football include former Tennessee Titans defensive lineman Rien Vartan Long and kicker Garo Yepremian, who booted his way to an undefeated season and a Super Bowl for the Miami Dolphins in a 14-year career.



As a Stanford Cardinal (left), Edwards started 31 games and threw for 36 touchdowns. (Below) Trent and his grandfather Ben, circa 1995.



Dossier

Benjamin Suren Morjig

Born April 27, 1919 in Fresno, Calif., Benjamin Suren Morjig is the grandfather of Trent Edwards. His parents, Haig (born in Erzinga) and Parig (born in Erzurum), changed their last name from "Morjigian" to "Morjig" upon their arrival to the United States. Both his maternal and paternal grandparents were from Erzinga. His daughter, Fran, said "he was a very humble man who knew it was important to appreciate your blessings. He never talked about what he had and he valued people to who they were as a person." Before his grandson reached NFL fame, Morjig was widely known inside track and field circles as a starter. In 1968, former Head Track Coach of the U.S. Olympic Team, Payton Jordan, billed Ben as "one of the best starters in America." In 1969, Morjig co-founded the Armenian Summer Olympics. While growing up, Trent and his entire family participated in the games. In the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics, Morjig served as a judge. In 2001, Morjig passed away in Castro Valley, Calif. Doctors believe he had a stroke while driving his El Camino. Trent says that his grandfather has been the greatest influence in his life.



Note

2007 Draft

The quarterback position in the 2007 NFL Draft had a Heisman Trophy Award winner (Smith), a Heisman finalist that has since been traded (Quinn) and the No.1 overall pick in JaMarcus Russell, who has accumulated the worst record of any quarterback taken with the first overall pick and has since been released of his \$68 million dollar contract. Kevin Kolb might have the most upside, but Trent Edwards, plagued with injuries and a woeful offensive line, has been by far the most consistent and successful quarterback from this draft class.

JaMarcus Russell (No. 1 Overall pick) 7-18 record as a starter, 18 Touchdowns/23 Interceptions
Brady Quinn (22nd overall pick) 3-9 record, 10 TD/9 INT
Kevin Kolb (36th overall pick) 1-1 record, 4 TD/7 INT
John Beck (40th overall pick) 0-3 record, 1 TD/3 INT
Drew Stanton (43rd overall pick) 0-1 record, 1 TD/6 INT
Trent Edwards (92nd overall pick) 14-16 record, 24 TD/25 INT
Troy Smith (174th pick) 1-1 record, 3 TD/1 INT



THE TWO MINUTE DRILL



On the pressures of being a quarterback in the National Football League...

I have been numb to the pressures and critics that most people would be too concerned with. I have come to the conclusion that if I worry about Jim Kelly or read every single article online, that's taking time away from me getting better. That's just how it is in the NFL. If you are a quarterback that's not winning, you are not going to get any credit at all. But when you win, all the credit is there. My plan is that we are going to start winning, I'm going to get all the credit and I'm not going to get overly excited about it.

In order, his list of top three quarterbacks in the league today...

Drew Brees, Tom Brady, and Peyton Manning.

On playing with wide receiver diva Terrell Owens...

It's amazing to me how it went on a whole other level than what I had imagined it to be. With every interview and every question, it's 'You're Trent Edwards, but how's Terrell Owens?' Athletically, he was above and beyond anyone else I've ever played with. The hard part too is that it comes with somewhat of a distraction as much as you say it's not when you are asked about him all the time. It's like being the parent of a delinquent child and you walk into the grocery store, you are going to have people ask about your kid all the time. That's a pretty good comparison to how it is with Terrell. Like, this guy is constantly

on my mind. I don't think of my teammates Lee Evans or Roscoe Parrish all the time.

On playing in the city of Buffalo...

Buffalo is what you would think of the complete opposite of California. What I knew going into the NFL draft process is that I had pictured Buffalo as this cold, kind of older city and I suddenly got drafted there. It's a total shift with weather, people and location. Not too many direct flights from Buffalo to California unfortunately. But the thing about it, which is nice, is that the people are really genuine. I almost look at it like I have two separate lifestyles – the California lifestyle and the Buffalo lifestyle. I wouldn't say one is better than the other, but that's the way it has gone for me so far.

On the 2010 NFL season...

On paper, we are looking like we aren't going to be doing anything this year. But the low expectations will help us too because not a lot of people are giving us any credit. You go to work every day and you realize the only people believing in you are the teammates in your locker room, and the trainers and coaches. If you have a group of people that all believe in one common goal, there is no reason you can't win football games in this league. I don't think there is any reason why we can't all go in one direction and surprise a lot of people.

On whether or not the Bills front office and management has built the team to win now...

It's a tough spot to be in when you take the approach that the front office has not given us the players to succeed. I definitely don't have that approach or attitude. If you do have that attitude, you'll never get to where you want to be. I'm not sitting here blaming anyone but myself. I can only control myself, not the management. They are paid a lot of money to do their jobs. I'm not going to criticize them, but it's still tough. You see teams like the Jets and the Dolphins making moves to improve their teams, and you end up saying to yourself 'it would've been nice to see if we could have gotten him.'

On seeing himself in a Bills uniform in 2011 and beyond...

Yeah, I would like to think so because that would mean that we are playing at a 10-6 level and I am playing at a high level and they want to bring me back in to be their quarterback. That would be the most ideal situation for me because that would mean that we're playing well and doing some things we have never done before.

On Armenia...

I've never been to Armenia, but I definitely want to make a trip. I haven't been to anywhere in Europe, or crossed the Atlantic Ocean for that matter. My uncle Steve goes all the time and loves it and my sister Shelby went in 2004 to play basketball for the Armenian Olympics games in Yerevan. My family always says great things about it and I want to get acquainted with the culture. ☺