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Owego grad in the middle of Everett's on-field care

Marzo tells students about job as Bills' medical director

By [Michael Sharp](#)
Press & Sun-Bulletin

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OWEGO -- As medical director for the Buffalo Bills, Owego Free Academy graduate Dr. John Marzo is occasionally asked to name the worst injury he's seen.

It used to be that he'd point to a blown out knee -- three torn ligaments, chipped cartilage. It was, Marzo said, a career-ender.

But ever since Sept. 9, he has a new answer.

Marzo, who gave a 40-minute presentation Friday as part of Owego-Apalachin Middle School's Eighth Grade Career Day Exploration Program, was on the field three months ago when Buffalo Bills tight end Kevin Everett suffered a serious spinal cord injury while making a tackle.

The injury left Everett paralyzed from the neck down, and soon after, on life support. And it was Marzo who was there to coordinate the emergency rescue on the field.

"I walked off the sideline, and coach (Dick) Jauron said to me, 'What do you think?' " Marzo said.

"And I tearfully said to him, 'Coach, this is my worst nightmare.' Because I just knew. At the time he was completely paralyzed. Most people don't recover from that."

Everett, though, has proved an exception. And Friday, as Marzo was making his presentation in the school's auditorium, The Associated Press was quoting anonymous sources as saying Everett was now walking under his own power at a Houston rehab center.

"I talked to Kevin at his home on the phone about two weeks ago," Marzo said. "Just kind of say hi, and update, and just to hear from him. He sounds great. He really does. He's so positive, and the bottom line is, again, he's had such a great recovery that we're all very pleased."

The mood was decidedly darker three months ago, when Marzo rushed onto the field to help Everett.

He and others worked to immobilize his neck, moving him ever-so-carefully from his stomach onto his back, and then getting him from the field to an awaiting ambulance.

"Obviously there's the initial shock of realizing that he's paralyzed," Marzo said. "And then you sort of go into training mode. That's a drill that we do. We practice with the trainers, we talk about the what ifs."



Special to the Press & Sun-Bulletin

Dr. John Marzo signs a Buffalo Bills T-shirt for Ed Dunbar, an eighth-grader at Owego-Apalachin Middle School, on Friday.

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"So after we realized what it was and made a preliminary diagnosis, the rest was sort of just, take action. So we did that, and we did a good job. We rescued him well. We sent him away in the ambulance. It was then that I really realized kind of what had happened. There's a little bit of a down moment where in fact I questioned why I was standing there on the sideline watching the rest of that football game when I had a player that was in such extreme condition. But then, really, his critical care took place at the hospital."

A 1976 graduate of Owego, Marzo has been with the Bills since 1991. As medical director, he oversees Buffalo's other physicians, athletic trainers and physical therapists. He also serves as the team's orthopedic surgeon, a position he had also held with the NHL's Buffalo Sabres until this year.

That's all in addition to his job as an orthopedic surgeon with University Orthopedics -- the University at Buffalo's full-time faculty department in orthopedic surgery.

Back in his old stomping grounds Friday, Marzo talked about his start, outlined other careers in the sports medicine field and the academic steps required for each, and presented slides of specific injuries he's worked on.

"What I hope is that them just seeing me here, and realizing that I went to this school -- everybody thinks being a doctor in the NFL is the pinnacle, it's the best of the best, and it's as high as you can go," he said. "I wanted them to know that you can get there, starting from right here at Owego."

He closed with the words, "I love what I do for a living." And afterward he took some questions, and when asked, signed a Buffalo Bills hat and a few T-shirts.

Kris Pelton, 13, and Kenneth Heisch II, 12, weren't sure the medical field was for them. They've both considered, among other things, jobs as video game designers. Though they still gave Marzo high marks for his first such speech back at Owego.

"I thought it was good," Pelton said. "I'm not sure if I want to do that stuff, but it seemed interesting."

Added Heisch: "I think it was well thought out and planned."


As for what stood out to them, Pelton pointed to the microscopic camera that Marzo talked about, while Heisch picked something out of his talk on nutrition.

"Just that fats are good, not bad," Heisch said. "I learned this in science, but still, hearing it again helps."

Marzo, who has three daughters, now lives outside of Buffalo in Williamsville, though he still has family in the area. He started at quarterback for two-plus seasons at Owego before going on to play at Colgate and try out with the Patriots.

"It's a comfort zone coming back," he said. "I love Owego. I love the area. And it's really where I got my start. So again, it's very comfortable coming back home."

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