

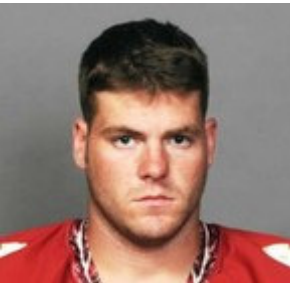


The Associated Press  
Bills coach Dick Jauron gathers with players at the team's rookie minicamp this weekend. Garrison Sanborn was among the invitees.

## decision

By [JOEY JOHNSTON](#) | The Tampa Tribune  
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### Garrison Sanborn



**The Wake-Up Call greets you each weekday with news, views and a few Tampa Bay area sports offerings to anticipate for the day and night. We encourage suggestions and contributions.**

Good morning!

It was a typical NFL transaction, announced Tuesday morning, and you can expect it as a small-type item today in many of America's newspapers.



*BUFFALO BILLS* — Announced the signing of free-agent long-snapper [Garrison Sanborn](#).

There's a story behind that sentence.

Oh, what a story.

**Sanborn**, who played at [Jesuit High School](#) and Florida State University, has nurtured a lifelong dream – to play in the NFL. At FSU, he was the long-snapper for two seasons, the anonymous guy on the punt and field-goal teams, the one nobody ever notices (until something goes wrong).

Last year, after competing in the Senior Bowl, he was invited to try out for the Buccaneers. He also worked out for the Bills. But it seemingly led nowhere.

No callbacks, no promises, nothing.

**Sanborn**, who earned three degrees at FSU (finance, real estate, management), was hired as a systems support analyst by BayCare Integrated Service Center, helping to oversee the software program for seven Tampa Bay area hospitals in the BayCare Health System.

He loved the job. And he loved its flexibility.

It allowed him time to work out afterward, four days a week, keeping his body in shape in case an NFL team called. On the fifth day, **Sanborn** headed by himself to an athletic field in Carrollwood, long-snapping footballs into a soccer net, affixing a T-shirt as the target, drilling one after another down the center, thousands of repetitions over time.

"There are times, in the back of your mind, when you wonder, 'Is this ever going to lead anywhere?' " he said.

Eleven days ago, the Bills called **Sanborn**, asking whether he could come to their rookie minicamp.

**Sanborn's** heart raced.

Then it sank.

Buffalo's rookie minicamp was the weekend of May 1 — the weekend his older sister and best friend, Maureen, was getting married to Alex Cottom. **Sanborn** was a groomsman.

He went to them both, a little scared.

"What do I do?"

They didn't hesitate.

"It's a no-brainer," they both said. "You've got to go to the minicamp. It's your dream."

**Sanborn** still didn't feel right about it but dedicated the opportunity to his sister, to her unselfishness. Every time he ached in practice, every time he felt like quitting, he would think of her, then go a little harder, a little faster.

Things were made easier when **Sanborn's** girlfriend, Tara Fries, a bridesmaid, took photographs of Saturday night's wedding and texted them along. **Sanborn** also wrote a heartfelt speech that was read at the reception. He was hundreds of miles away — but he was there.

On Sunday, about the time that Maureen and Alex had finished packing for their honeymoon to Aruba, some Bills officials pulled **Sanborn** aside. They liked his work. They offered him a two-year contract.

"I guess everything happens for a reason," **Sanborn** said.

So what about that BayCare position? His bosses have been understanding. **Sanborn**, who will depart for Buffalo and the organized team activities in a few weeks, will take a leave of absence. Everybody is hoping he makes the team. If it doesn't happen, he'll get his old job back.

The Bills have an experienced long-snapper in Ryan Neil, a defensive lineman from Rutgers, who is adept at snapping, blocking and getting down the field to cover kicks.

"They want competition, and I want to compete," said **Sanborn**, who is 6-foot, 240 pounds. "They say the best player is going to play, and I have to show them that I'm the best player.

"It's strange because it's something that I've been imagining my whole life. Then an opportunity happens, and it's almost like it's not real. When I think about how understanding my sister has been, how great my work has been, how could I not be fired up to give this every bit of determination that I have?"

*BUFFALO BILLS – Announced the signing of free-agent long-snapper **Garrison Sanborn**.*

That's the news – in capsulized form.

But the real news is **Sanborn's** story.

How can you not love it?