

The Fan Connection



Directed by Mary Wall

Produced by Mary Wall and Eric Wojtanik

93 min. | USA | 2019

www.fanconnectionmovie.com

LOGLINE

In a forlorn Rust Belt city, cheering for the NHL team means cheering for the city itself. Through three intimate stories of die-hard hockey fans in a city struggling to overcome its past, *The Fan Connection* shows that with heart, grit, and hope people can rise above their expectations.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In the Rust Belt city of Buffalo, NY, frustration is at an all time high after decades of decline and broken promises. Not seeing a path to renewal for their city in the politicians or corporations who have let them down for decades, the beleaguered yet loyal citizens turn to their professional hockey team for relevance, not just for their city, but for themselves.

The Fan Connection is a deeply personal fly-on-the-wall look at the lives of die-hard fans over a hockey season. Ultimately, it is a heart-warming story of what it means to be a fan, identifying with a city, and the power of ordinary citizens to affect change.

LONG SYNOPSIS

The Rust Belt city of Buffalo, NY yearns to reclaim its lost pride despite a growing sense of futility and cynicism after decades of decline. When a new owner buys their professional hockey team and promises a championship, Buffalonians see a path to their city's relevance.

Throughout this season of unprecedented hopes, we meet a nonagenarian rehabbing from a serious fall, a young man with cerebral palsy determined to learn to drive after doubting himself for years, and a teenager struggling to find her identity while coping with the death of her father. As these fans overcome life's struggles and cheer their team, ordinary citizens take responsibility for their city, refusing to wait for politicians or silver-bullet solutions to determine their future.

Combining archival material, interviews, and hand-held vérité footage, *The Fan Connection* immerses us in the stories of everyday Buffalonians to shed light on the larger story of why sports matter in a city seeking to rise from the ashes.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was part of a generational exodus from my hometown of Buffalo, NY. But, like so many Buffalo ex-pats, I never lost that emotional connection to my city or to the Sabres, our professional hockey team.

So, in 2006, I was thrilled to spend the entirety of my two-month hiatus in Buffalo, landing in time to be a part of the Sabres almost magical 2006 playoff run. Ultimately, they would not reach the Stanley Cup finals, but I was mesmerized by what that run had done for the city. People were united and hopeful as if the entire city was on the team. Drove of fans even showed up at the airport to thank the team after they eventually lost.

Who does that? I had to explore this idea, but it wasn't until 2011 when I knew that this idea was a documentary about a city that had consistently lost in every way told through fans of a hockey team that had also always lost. It was a story about loyalty, pride, and hope in the face of near constant disappointment, and I had to make it RIGHT NOW! A new Sabres owner was promising a Stanley Cup in three years. If his vision came to be, this movie would be moot. It's easy to be loyal to and cheer for a winner but it's something special to cheer for a team and a city that never wins.

This story would only be as strong as the fans I found to be in the movie; an audience would only care about Buffalo and the Sabres if they cared about the people who did. I held "casting" sessions, and when 170 people showed up, I knew my life would change. I went back to Los Angeles, quit a job that I loved on a bona-fide hit, *The Office*, and was shortly back in Buffalo filming the start of the 2011 Sabres' season.

Over the next four years, I filmed 13 people in all aspects of their lives: hospital and cemetery visits, driving lessons, and, of course, watching Sabres games. I traveled as a one-person crew, directing as well as working the camera and sound as I tried to normalize my presence in everyone's lives. As they grew accustomed to my (and the camera's) presence, I was granted access to their hopes, dreams, and vulnerabilities.

Throughout this, I learned more about my hometown, reading the newspaper every day and researching its history. I found stories of more people taking responsibility for the city and was uniquely positioned to showcase Buffalo as it went through a wholly unexpected period of growth.

In the end, I amassed 1000 hours of footage, and spent two years whittling the personal stories from thirteen to three. Then, thanks to a successful Kickstarter campaign (our only source of outside funding), we hired a post team to complete this story. Along with my producer and editor, we melded all the unique threads (city, Sabres, and personal) to tell a heartwarming story of persistence and resilience.

After watching the movie I hope people will feel empowered – that they are capable of creating their own change and don't have to wait for someone else to do it for them.

-Mary Wall

THE CHARACTERS

MARK

Mark was born with a “touch of cerebral palsy” and raised in western New York. He grew up a Sabres fan, spending his childhood around the players because his physical therapist also worked as the team’s assistant strength coach. Mark sees the team as a means for both him and Buffalo, the city he loves, to get a win. He just “wants to know that feeling – just once.” Seeking more independence and looking for his own win, Mark recommits to learning to drive after ten years of doubting himself because of a bad experience. Now set up with hand controls, Mark pushes through the ups and downs of trying to get his license in order to prove to himself and those around him that, “even with a disability, people can do anything.” All the while, he is calculating and recalculating playoff odds as the season unfolds.

HANNAH & RENÉE

After marrying Chris, an uber-Sabres fan, Renée moved from North Carolina to Buffalo at a time when most Buffalonians were deserting the city in droves. Together, they raised their daughter, Hannah, as a Sabres fan until Chris passed away from a sudden, serious illness when Hannah was only seven years old. It was during this tragedy that Renée and Hannah saw all the reasons why Buffalo is the City of Good Neighbors as they leaned on their community for support. Now a teenager, Hannah struggles with acceptance from her peers and herself as she navigates growing up without her father. Renée and Hannah remain steadfast Sabres fans as a way to stay connected to Chris.

FRANCES, MICKEY, & MICHEL

After 68 years of marriage, Frances and Mickey want nothing more than to “be here [together] for a few more years,” and to see the Sabres win a Stanley Cup. They moved to Buffalo after Mickey returned from WWII and have lived through the city’s ups and downs while raising their family. They have been Sabres fans since the franchise began in 1970 and fans of the sport of hockey for even longer. Their passion for the Sabres has been entwined in every part of their lives, from using hockey cards as flash cards to quiz their grandchildren to Frances recording her own stats during games. Now, as Frances recovers from a serious fall, they, along with their granddaughter, Michel, must navigate their new reality all while hoping that this year is the year they win a Stanley Cup.

FILMMAKER BIOS

MARY WALL, Director/Producer

Mary Wall grew up outside of Buffalo, NY, and after stints as a high school mathematics teacher and environmental engineer, she moved to Los Angeles where she worked on *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation*. While there, she wrote digital material for *The Office* on NBC.com, including several webisodes. One of those webisodes, “The Third Floor,” which she co-wrote with Jonathan Hughes and Kelly Hannon, resulted in a Writers Guild Nomination for Short Form New Media. She combined her love of problem-solving and storytelling at Carnegie Mellon University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing.

ERIC WOJTANIK, Producer

Raised in Eden, NY, Eric Wojtanik got his start producing low-budget independent projects before moving to Los Angeles to work in sitcom television. He has worked on several television series including *Dads*, *Cristela*, *Lady Dynamite* and *Speechless*, where he earned a shared script-writing credit on the episode “Game Night”. He honed his story crafting skills at SUNY Oswego, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Cinema and Screen Studies and Creative Writing. He received the Chancellor’s Award for Student Excellence upon graduation, the highest academic and extracurricular honor in the SUNY system.

BLAIR PENNINGTON, Editor

Blair Pennington is a documentary filmmaker and editor whose star is rapidly rising. She is a 2018 graduate of the Dodge College of Film and Media Arts at Chapman University where she earned her BFA in News and Documentary. Her short documentary, “How We Eat,” was a finalist in competition at the 2019 Big Sky Documentary Film Festival. She has also had films premiere at the 2017 Beverly Hills International Film Festival and the 2017 Awareness Film Festival. Blair currently lives in Los Angeles, where she continues to work in documentary filmmaking.

JOHN SWIHART, Composer

John has composed scores for over one hundred films and television series. Notable titles include NBC’s *Trial and Error* and *Go On*, as well as the Emmy Award-Winning-Series *How I Met Your Mother*. On the feature film side, John composed original scores for *Youth in Revolt*, *Employee of the Month*, and *Napoleon Dynamite*, for which he won a Golden Satellite Award and received a Grammy nomination. John attended Berklee College of Music in Boston where he developed his commitment to finding unique sounds that resonate with story to create memorable contemporary scores. He currently lives in Los Angeles where he continues to compose for feature films and television.

FULL CREDITS

Directed by Mary Wall

Produced by Mary Wall
Eric Wojtanik

Edited by Blair Pennington

Music by John Swihart

Featuring

Michel Coffey	Mark Crehan
Frances Davidovich	Michael "Mickey" Davidovich
Hannah Tarrant	Renée Tarrant

Also Featuring

Patrick Allen	Dan Ball
Sarah Cudmore	Don Dauman
Jerry Guzman	Eugene McAndrew
Philip Merrilees	Samantha Nephew
Patrick Veltri	James Wright
Salvatore Buscaglia	Ibrahim Cissé
Colin Dabkowski	Tom Eoannu
Mike Harrington	Rick Jeanneret
Don Luce	Cory Martin
Jason Pominville	Rob Ray
Mike Robitaille	Dr. Mark Seery
Doug Swift	Dr. Henry L. Taylor Jr.
Rod Watson	

Robert Ball	Elissa Banas
Chris Carden	Andy Coffey
Dennis Crean	Mark V. Crehan
Mary Crehan	James Demarco
Dr. Tessa Flores	Christopher Jamele
David Kraft	Tom Lorentz
Matt Meddaugh	Dr. John O'Donnell
Mark Pfohl	Robert J. Schaefer Jr.
Dr. Timothy Schwach	Darrell Shepherd
Danielle Szymendera	Nancy Tepas

James Carmody	Peter Faint
Dr. Joseph Gambacorta	Erika Gault
Ntare Ali Gault	Paul Humphries
Robert Mackenzie Keast	Dayna Leaman
Mark Martin	Margaret "Peg" Overdorf
Marcus Trueheart	Lisa Wall

Sound Mixed at Jacksonland Studios by Bill Jackson

Colorist	Ryan Fleet
Visual Effects/Graphics	Kathleen Kirkman
Story Consultant	Kevin Lavelle
Additional Music	David Gonzalez
Editorial Staff	Matthew Bourgeois
	Scott Clifford
	Jay Cooney
	Simone Lapidus

Francisco Simbana
Jaime Villanueva
Steven Wang

Additional Camera Operators

Travis Cannan
Eric Castellazo
Mark James II
James Jax
Jon Metz
Cherylin Pauly
Jenny Redding
Michael Roman
Alana Stecura
Joey Vaughn

Boom Operators

Matt Davies
Jessica Drake
Michael Roman

Production Assistants

Matt Clark
Mike Gerber
Terrence Harding
Matt Moshier-Feeney
Hugh O'Donnell
Cherylin Pauly
Emily Prendergast
Elizabeth Salamone
Alana Stecura
Kathleen Weaver

Berlin Unit

Director	Loren Marsh
Camera Operator	Lothar Herzog
Tagline Film	Katie Young Cree Nevins Alexander Coppedge
Clearance Counsel	Donaldson + Callif LLP Chris Perez David Fox
Flash Cuts	Eurie Chung
Digital Vortechs	Jami Olson
Buffalo Niagara Film Commission	Tim Clark Rich Wall
Lockton Insurance Brokers, LLC	Yvette Akeh Laura Espinoza Andrea Uribe
Hilbert College	Chris Gallant
North Park Theatre	Ray Barker Chris Dearing
Hamburg Palace Theatre	Jay Ruof

Dick Clark Productions Screening
Room

David Garonzik
Ian Smith

Explore Buffalo

Brad Hahn

The Studio on Seneca

Erin Moran
Kari Fineour

Additional Materials by

100isNow/ "100% Buffalo, NY: PUSH Buffalo"

Rusty Kennedy/AP

Louis Lanzano/AP

Robert Mecea/AP

Kevin Beam/ "Open house at the Buffalo Aud 1994"

Jamie Bradburn

Buffalo Bruises

The Buffalo News

Derek Gee/Buffalo News

"That '70s Show"/The Carsey-Werner Company

CBC Sports

Marjory Collins

emeresonetom

George Rose/Getty Images

"Better Days" Hockey WNY LLC

mikebordon/ "Sabres Rangers Game 5 Tying Goal"

MSG Networks Inc.

"The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson"

The National Broadcasting Company

National Football League

National Hockey League

NBC Sports

“Celebrate the Tradition”

Niagara Frontier Hockey L.P./Gail Anthony and Tom Gaulin

<https://www.peopletopeople.com/itineraries/austrailian-odyssey-2019/>

PUSH Buffalo/ “PUSH Buffalo | Green Development Zone:
Growing A Local Green Economy”

“A last look at a Stones venue. Buffalo Memorial Auditorium” The Sicilian

Mickey Osterreicher/SUNY Buffalo State

TSN Hockey

www.urbandictionary.com, “Buffalo, NY” by Leaving the dump!

Kevin Hoffman/US PRESSWIRE

Kim Klement/US PRESSWIRE

WIVB-TV

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