

FOOTBALL from Page 12

My bookie, Dr. Intensity (not his real name), is an odd one as bookmakers go. He's usually brooding over the Wall Street Journal or on the phone trying to close a deal on a new Chrysler when I stop over on money day. Bookmaking is of secondary interest to him, really catering to a small clientele of regulars. And he books none of this other fluff, such as basketball. Only football, which brings us back to Monday night and the Rams.

I've found that it's more comforting, for me at least, to watch a game that I have money on in a bar. Not just a place where you can get a drink, but a BAR, filled with blue-collar drunks and hapless Monday night gamblers like myself. For some reason, I always seem to feel more in control of a game when I am in this sort of environment, and Barry's Bar and Grill suited my viewing needs nicely for the second half.

L.A. had squandered several opportunities to put the affair out of reach in the first half with offensive penalties and turnovers. The 3 1/2 spread fell in and out of jeopardy throughout the second half as the two teams traded field goals until the fourth quarter. 10-6 Rams, 10-9 Rams, and then finally the Bills did something they hadn't been able to do for 3 1/2 quarters -- sustain a drive for a touchdown, making the score: Bills 16, Rams 13. L.A. had 2:23 remaining, the

football and a major offensive threat in Jim Everett. There still was hope. I bore down on another Miller Genuine Draft in an effort to steady my nerves. But the Rams were stopped four straight times, and Buffalo took over on downs. It was time to leave, with a reminder of what I'd always known -- bookies cannot be beaten.

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I was stopped at a red light at 17th and O streets when the annoying voice of Brent Musburger

crackled through my car speaker. A fumble. Buffalo, attempting to run out the clock, had given the ball to a careless Thurman Thomas who left the ball laying on the wet turf of Orchard Park. Here was another chance, a rare thing for gamblers.

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I was in the checkout line thinking about designer suits and I.R.A.'s when, looking up at the black and white screen in the corner of the room, I saw a hideous mirage. Buffalo, with just 20 seconds left in the game, somehow had driven to the Ram 22-yard line. A quick screen pass to Thurman Thomas turned into a 14-yard gain when a would-be tackler, in an effort to make the play, staggered and fell down like some lost wino. Madness. With 16 seconds left, quarterback Frank Reich again hit Thomas, this time for an 8-yard touchdown that sealed my doom.

I took back the Heineken, opting instead for Black Label.

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