

ORCHARD PARK - Tremaine Edmunds says he hasn't given it any thought, but now that the Buffalo Bills postseason is in full swing, he was reminded on Wednesday that any game he plays now could be his last for the franchise that drafted him No. 16 overall in 2018.

"I mean, honestly, now that you're asking me the question, I guess it hasn't (crossed my mind)," Edmunds said with a smile. "But there's a lot of things that I can't control. Buffalo has been my home now for five years, it's definitely a family here, I would love to be here. The fan base has been great to me, coaches have been great to me and everybody has been great to me these five years."

Edmunds was not given a contract extension prior to 2022 and if one doesn't happen before mid-March, the 24-year-old - how is it possible he's only 24? - will be eligible to test unrestricted free agency.

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And while Edmunds has certainly been a polarizing player among fans and some media in his five seasons, don't think for a second that if he gets to the open market, there won't be several teams lined up to blow him away with more than enough money to entice him to pack his bags and move on from the only NFL team he has known.

The Ravens just gave Roquan Smith a market-setting five-year, \$100 million deal with \$45 million guaranteed. That's easily within Edmunds' reach and it may also be too rich for the Bills' salary cap. They're already counting nine players scheduled to earn at least \$10 million on the 2023 ledger which takes up approximately \$154 million, including Josh Allen's \$39.7 million.

It might not be possible to bring him back, and make no mistake, it would be a huge loss for the Bills defense.

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Edmunds just enjoyed the best season of his career, and while his running mate, Matt Milano, earned first-team All-Pro honors, Edmunds was every bit as productive.

"I would agree," coach Sean McDermott said when asked if this was Edmunds' best season. "He's done a really nice job. Leadership wise as well and just really, his maturation, his development."

It's funny because Edmunds has two Pro Bowl invitations on his resume, and

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there were many who questioned whether he deserved either one. He hasn't been invited to this year's newly-revamped popularity contest (for that matter, neither was Milano), but this was the year both should have.

Tremaine Edmunds has impressive stats this season

Edmunds led the Bills with 102 tackles even though he missed three games (his fifth straight season over 100), and his pass coverage numbers were - according to Pro Football Focus - the best of his career. In fact, PFF rated Edmunds the best coverage linebacker in the league as he allowed a career-low 67.2% catch percentage and just 310 yards allowed.

Last week, Edmunds was sublime against Miami. He was all over the field, but one play in the fourth quarter really stood out, a play that not many linebackers could make.

After making a quick read at the snap, he knew he needed to be deep down the middle of the field. Sure enough, that's exactly where Skylar Thompson threw the ball, trying to hit tight end Mike Gesicki. Thanks to his speed and athleticism, Edmunds played it like a safety and broke it up, one of four breakups he had in the game.

"Yeah, it showed up there," McDermott said of Edmunds' outstanding coverage ability. "He's a tough guy to throw over in that regard because of his height, because of his wingspan. He's a great guy to have out there."

In addition to his four passes defensed, Edmunds also was in on five tackles and three QB pressures, one of which was nearly a sack.

Not that this surprised defensive coordinator Leslie Frazier who has been singing the oft-criticized linebacker's praises since the moment he arrived in town.

"He's been a really good player for us throughout," Frazier said. "He's gone to Pro Bowls, he's received that recognition from around the league and we've always respected his talent and his leadership within our ballclub. And I think now people are beginning to see some of the same things that we've been seeing all along."

Edmunds still lacks the splash plays. In 81 career games counting the postseason he has only five picks (one in Week

18 against the Patriots) and one fumble recovery. More of those would be nice, but there is so much to Edmonds's game, such as the ability to make that pass breakup last week, that gets overlooked.

"His playmaking ability's beginning to show up," Frazier said. "That hit that he had (Sunday) on that third down, (he crushed Dolphins running back Salvon Ahmed on a flat pass) that was big, man. That's what you want to see, the physical play that you need from the middle linebacker position."

Frazier also noted that Edmonds's leadership, both physical and vocal, "Has gone to another level. And we kind of needed that especially with the absence of Micah (Hyde) and then with Jordan (Poyer) being in and out of the lineup at times. We needed Tremaine to take another step from a leadership standpoint when it comes to being more vocal, and he's done that."

Who would replace Tremaine Edmonds if he leaves the Bills?

Rookie Terrel Bernard is Edmonds's understudy at Mike linebacker, and it's possible that he steps into the starting lineup next season if Edmonds isn't re-signed. Bernard measures in at 6-foot-1 and 224 pounds, so he's going to look a whole lot different to opposing QBs than Edmonds.

"Yeah, for sure," Bernard said. "He's a little bit different. He's 6-5, 250 and can fly around so not too many people on the football field look like him. He's so much different than really any of the other linebackers in the room with how he's built."

Edmonds and the entire Buffalo defense will be tested mightily by a dangerous Cincinnati passing game and that's where Edmonds's focus is this week.

"I'm just focused on winning and that's what I got my mind set on," he said. "I'll let everybody make their predictions or assumptions and I just continue to move forward as far as understanding what's the task at hand right now. I can't really dwell on that right now because obviously we're in a critical time of our season and my focus is on winning 100%."

But after talking about the subject of his possibly leaving, it was clear that he would miss everything about being a

Bill, in Buffalo.

“I love it here,” he said. “(They’ve) done a good job of just creating a winning culture, a culture that you want to be a part of and a culture that I would like to be a part of.

It’d be tough, man. You spend five years somewhere, these are my brothers. You spend so much time, you sacrifice so much, you put so much into it. But like I said, I’m just focused on this week and making sure this is not my last game. That’s what I’m focused on.”

Sal Maiorana can be reached at maiorana@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @salmaiorana. To subscribe to Sal's new twice-a-week newsletter, Bills Blast, please follow this link:
<https://profile.democratandchronicle.com/newsletters/bills-blast>

Reference

[The Ultimate Guide to the Mechanical Engineering Interview](#)

[How to Be Good at Science, Technology, and Engineering](#)