

The Chip & Chud Conundrum

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Friday, January 11 2013 1:03 PM - Last Updated Friday, January 11 2013 3:48 PM



Let's say you need a new pair of pants.

(And considering at least three quarters of you reading this are male, this isn't a strictly hypothetical scenario.)

You've got a 30% off coupon, but it expires today, and the store closes in 10 minutes. You race in but find out they're completely out of the pants you wanted. You head for the door, disappointed, but then remember you've got the coupon. It would be a waste not to use it, even if it means you buy something you don't really need.

So you quickly grab a plaid flannel shirt without trying it on - one just like a half-dozen others you just donated to Goodwill - and head for the register.

You get home, cut the tags off, hang Rob Chudzinski in your closet, and begin to ask yourself

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what the hell you just did.

In this haberdashery flight of fancy, you are the Browns. The closing of the store represents the time constraint the Browns were under as - ahem - “viable” coaching candidates got snapped up each day. And the 30% off coupon is the football genius of Jimmy Haslam and Joe Banner.

But really, what makes this situation another classic Cleveland clusterfuck is the pants.

For the pants are Chip Kelly.

From now until the end of Rob Chudzinski’s tenure as Browns’ head coach (likely coinciding with the start of the next round of presidential primaries), we will never be able to forget that he wasn’t Haslam or Banner’s first choice. Probably wasn’t their second or third choice, either.

Putting it in highly appropriate terms, he was their Chris Palmer.

It was obvious from the first *SportsCenter* after Pat Shurmur was shown the door that Chip Kelly was their guy. Let’s ignore the debate on why/how they were unable to get the guy they really wanted for the moment and focus on the fundamental, hydrogen-bomb-explosion wrongness of their mentality in the first place.

To conceptualize what it would have been like for Kelly to come to Cleveland, imagine the Butch Davis hiring again, only this time with the caveat that all the right-handed guys on the roster would have to be released. Kelly was Gerry Faust, George Kokinis, and Mayor Dennis Kucinich rolled into one.

When Kelly opted out, he saved the Browns from themselves. They became the guy whose car broke down on his way to the racetrack to blow his life savings.

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But nitwittedness tends to endure. Anybody so dramatically convinced that such a bad idea was a good one will come up with other bad ideas.

The prevailing feeling Browns fans should have at this point is relief that we avoided the holocaust of a Chip Kelly era. If you want to focus on the positive of the Browns' latest coaching search, cease all brain function there.

Chip Kelly stood the Browns up at the altar. In response, they grabbed the closest bridesmaid - likely not even the maid of honor - and married her before they got laughed out of the church.

But maybe in this case it will work out. Since their fiance had antlers, breathed fire, and was going to try to run a gimmicky, sure-to-fail offense in the NFL, they couldn't help but be better off with the bridesmaid.

And not surprisingly in an offseason in which Chip Kelly somehow became the hot commodity, it was slim pickin's for bridesmaids this year. A coordinator from the Bengals? The Jerry Sandusky custodian at Penn State? Brian Kelly? Marc-friggin-Trestman, for the love of God?

After providing a brief head-fake toward predictability with a second Ken Whisenhunt interview, the Browns corkscrewed into the unexpected. It was Thursday night, *The Office* had just ended, and Rob Chudzinski was suddenly the head coach.

Whisenhunt likely would have been an adequate choice. So, too, would Lovie Smith. Both are flawed but proven commodities who'd led woebegone franchises to the Super Bowl. We should aspire to have such problems as these guys.

But Haslam and Banner wanted to plant their own flag on this continent of sorrow, so they needed a fresh face. And by Thursday, time was running out in this game of coaching musical chairs. So they grabbed Chudzinski before they wound up having to choose between Lee Harvey Oswald and Captain Kangaroo.

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Maybe it'll all work out.

But he wasn't their first choice.

Maybe he's just what the Browns need.

But he wasn't their first choice.

Maybe because he grew up as a Browns fan, he's the anointed savior who can rescue the franchise.

So was Brady Quinn.

And he wasn't their first choice, either.

Here's the worst part: if the hiring of Chudzinski turns out brilliantly and the Browns subsequently embark into a new golden era, it will all be ***in spite of*** the team's management strategy and solely because issues beyond their control prevented them from acting on their own absurdity.

Whether he succeeds or fails, we'll always wonder about the path not taken. In this case, the path the Browns really wanted to take. The guy they really wanted to hire.

The pants they really wanted to buy.

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