

## The Browns, Rob Chudzinski and the Art of Being Patient

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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No one knows if this is going to work.

It is going to take time to find out.

Those were the two biggest (and most important) takeaways from Friday's press conference to introduce Rob Chudzinski as the 14th coach (and sixth since 1999) of the Cleveland Browns.

Chudzinski sounded like a coach as he outlined – in very general terms – his vision of what he wants the Browns to be.

"This team, we're going to be an attacking offense, an attacking defense and we're going to play that way, that style with physical play, great effort and great finish," [Chudzinski said in his introductory news conference](#)

. "We're going to also, on both sides of the ball, we're going to build on a foundation of fundamentals and technique. We're going to give these guys great coaches, we're going to give them the tools that they can utilize in games to win games, we're going to focus on innovation, we're going to focus on giving them the best possible schemes and pushing the envelope on those things to give them and put them in the best possible position to win and be successful.

"We're going to focus on critical situations in games. We're talking about third down, we're

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talking about red zone, two minute, four minute because those things are the things that games come down to. We'll focus on that and then tying it all together with complementary football between special teams, defense and offense.”

No one knows how this is going to turn out – not Chudzinski, not Browns owner Jimmy Haslam or CEO Joe Banner, and certainly not the fans. There are simply no guarantees and no way of knowing if this is going to be a failure or not. But just because Chris Palmer, Butch Davis, Romeo Crennel, Eric Mangini and Pat Shurmur all didn't work out doesn't mean that Chudzinski will meet the same bitter end.

Chudzinski was certainly a surprise hiring – interviewed on Wednesday, hired on Thursday, introduced to on Friday. But that doesn't mean this is a bad hire.

Consider that, when NFL teams want to hire a coach, they have three choices:

- A college coach
- An NFL retread
- A first-time head coach who was a coordinator.

The Browns worked their way through that standard checklist, first trying the college route. They interviewed Chip Kelly and Doug Marronne, and didn't get a chance with Nick Saban and Bill O'Brien because they decided to stay at school.

They tried the NFL retread, interviewing Ken Whisenhunt and Lovie Smith.

They also went the coordinator route, meeting with Mike Zimmer, Ray Horton and Marc Trestman (a head coach in Canada, how's that for innovation?) in addition to Chudzinski.

This wasn't Randy Lerner hiring the first coach that flashed a little thigh at him (Mangini in 2009), or Mike Holmgren giving a family friend his big break (Shurmur in 2011).

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The Browns claim to have done their homework (of course, what team hires a coach and admits they are not thrilled?) and, in the end, all roads led to Charlotte and Chud.

“It was a very, very impressive group of people we met with, it leaves us very confident about this hire, very optimistic,” Banner said. “The criteria that we went into the marketplace for, which as we told you, we were focusing on a strong leader. Somebody who can create a culture in an entire program, put together a strong staff and manage it and was really, really committed to setting a very high bar and achieving it. We’re very excited about having Rob here and believe he fits exactly what we were looking for.”

It shouldn’t come as any surprise that Haslam and Banner passed on hiring Whisenhunt or Smith. This is their first major hire since taking over the Browns and they clearly were not going to go for someone else’s reject.

The fear, of course, is the possibility that Haslam and Banner are working hard to try and show that they are the smartest guys in the room. It appears that no one else was looking to interview Chudzinski this year (although he did interview last year with St. Louis, Jacksonville and Tampa Bay before deciding to remain as offensive coordinator with Carolina.

But it is [irrelevant if this hire creates “buzz” or not](#) . What we really need in this town is more wins. If Chudzinski can figure out how to do that, there will be plenty of buzz.

All Browns fans have to do is look around the AFC North to realize that creating buzz or landing the hot coordinator doesn’t always lead to success.

When Baltimore was looking for a coach after firing Brian Billick, they were turned down by Jason Garrett before hiring John Harbaugh, a first-time head coach who had never even been an offensive or defensive coordinator.

“You have to take chances in life to be successful,” [Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti told](#) [The](#)

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[Baltimore Sun](#)

[at the time of Harbaugh's hiring](#)

. "You have to be willing to do things that the masses wouldn't do or I don't think you're ever going to separate yourself from the masses.

"Is it a little bit more of a perceived chance? Yeah, if you didn't spend the last 15 hours with John Harbaugh. But the time we spent with him gave me a comfort level that we hired the right guy. The bottom line is I feel good about our choice and I like the fact that John gets to build his legend right here."

After five years and five playoff appearances, does anyone in Baltimore care that Harbaugh didn't create any buzz when he was hired?

How about Pittsburgh? The Steelers turned to Mike Tomlin after passing on Russ Grimm and Ron Rivera when they went looking for a coach after the 2006 season. Tomlin had spent one year as defensive coordinator with Minnesota and was considered a longshot to gain the job in Pittsburgh.

"I think it's fair to say Mike was in that category in terms of our initial discussion," [team president Art Rooney II told](#)

[The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#)  
[at the time of Tomlin's hiring](#)

. "He was probably a long shot when we began the discussions."

After two Super Bowl appearances (and one title), does anyone in Pittsburgh care that Tomlin wasn't the team's first choice?

Which brings us to the second point, and it is one that Browns fans don't want to hear.

For the Chudzinski hiring to have any chance of succeeding, the Browns have to give him time to make this work.

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That is a bitter reality for the fans because they have been the one constant through all the losing and nonsense that has gone on for the past 13 years (and by extension everything that has gone on since 1964 with not only the Browns, but the Cavs and the Indians as well. That plays a part in it too; it's not just the Browns, but all of Cleveland's sports teams that weigh down fans).

But while we have been here for all of it, Haslam and Banner have not. They can't be held accountable for the mistakes made by Dwight Clark, Phil Savage or Mangini. (Don't worry, though, they will make plenty of mistakes that they will be accountable for, we're sure.)

When you hire a first-time coach that is exactly what you get – a first-time coach. And with that comes mistakes and growing pains. The hope is the learning curve will be a short one for Chudzinski.

While Tomlin and Harbaugh walked into different situations than Chudzinski (the Steelers were coming off an NFL-assisted Super Bowl win and the Ravens had one of the league's best defenses) they also joined stable franchises that understand stability and the importance of giving a coach time to figure things out.

Giving a coach two years before throwing him out simply does not work and it can no longer be the model that the Browns follow if they really are committed to building a winning franchise.

That is one area that Chudzinski has working in his favor. As the first major hire by the new regime, he will be given every opportunity to succeed as Haslam and Banner are not going to want to admit they made a mistake. Unless he quits, it is highly likely that Chudzinski will be here for at least four years.

Will that be long enough to know if the Browns got it right? Time will tell.

While Haslam and Banner were not here for the past 13 years of disappointment, Chudzinski

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was, first as coach with Butch Davis and then as offensive coordinator under Crennel in 2007 and 2008.

That connection is probably going to hurt Chudzinski for a while with some fans, who will start screaming about the failures of 2008 every time something goes wrong with the offense or will have flashbacks to the end of 2007 if the Browns throw the ball too much in a cold-weather game.

That link to the past is what surprised us a little bit about the hiring. After cleaning out Holmgren, Tom Heckert and Shurmur, Haslam had finally cleansed the Browns of the last main pieces of the Randy Lerner era. Haslam was so close to exorcising those demons and giving this franchise what would truly be a fresh start.

Haslam re-established those ties, though, by hiring Chudzinski. And while this is more of a perception issue that fans will just have to deal with until the Browns start winning, it is something they will have to deal with.

While Chudzinski may not be creating “buzz” with fans, he earned the respect of the coaches and players while working with the Panthers.

“He’s really just a genius,” Panthers running back [Jonathan Stewart told \*The Charlotte Observer\*](#) [earlier this year](#). “He spends a lot of time with the offense trying to create ways for players to be successful. That’s what a good offensive coordinator and coach is all about. He does a good job of explaining what he wants, and what he expects out of us individually and collectively.”

“With Chud, there are no lines,” Carolina coach Ron Rivera said. “It’s just go out and do it, which I think is great. He has a progression of learning and the way he teaches things. He starts with simple, basic things and from there the sky is the limit.”

One encouraging sign is the speculation that [Chudzinski will hire Norv Turner as offensive](#)

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[coordinator](#)

. While a lousy head coach, Turner is a good coordinator who knows how to use a running back from his time coaching LaDainian Tomlinson and Emmitt Smith (somewhere Trent Richardson is smiling) and coach a quarterback.

Having an experienced hand like Turner to run the offense will help as, time and again, first-time coaches go into the job thinking they know all the responsibilities that will suck up their time only to find out it is much, much worse.

Hire Turner, find his equivalent as defensive coordinator, and suddenly the Browns may be on to something.

No one knows how this is all going to turn out. It is just as likely that Chudzinski will be the next Chris Palmer as it is that he will be the next Andy Reid.

But there is one thing we do know – he deserves a chance to find out.

*(Photo by ClevelandBrowns.com)*