

Talking Browns Football with Scotland's Sad Factory

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Sunday, April 21 2013 2:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, April 21 2013 10:47 AM



Being a fan of Cleveland sports is one of the better aspects of life, aside from the no championship thing, of course.

The allure of the Browns, Indians and Cavaliers is not just confined to Northeast Ohio, however, as the power of Cleveland sports extends not only across the country but internationally as well.

Which brings us to Murray Alexander

Murray is a 24-year-old from Glasgow, Scotland, and the author of [The Factory of Sadness](#), a blog about the Cleveland Browns that has been “churning out canned heartbreak since 1796.”

You can also find him on Twitter

[@SadFactory](#)

Murray was kind enough to sit down for a virtual Q&A on how he became a Browns fan, why things are going to be better under the new regime and the team’s prospects for 2013.

Q: So how does someone from Glasgow, Scotland, become a Cleveland Browns fan?

Murray: I'd had a casual interest in the NFL for a few years, the first Super Bowl I remember watching was the Pats-Eagles in 2005, but never really saw much more until we got satellite TV a couple of years later. Combined with getting hooked on *Friday Night Lights* and having a few friends that were into the NFL, I decided to give it a try. I was already a Cavs fan (when I got into the NBA I decided to follow which ever team drafted high school phenom LeBron James) so the Browns were a natural choice to balance out the Cavs' 60-win seasons. I really got into it pretty quickly, and since I graduated at the peak of the recession it meant I had a lot of time on my hands! Of course then LeBron left and I was stuck with two crummy teams, but it was too late by that point.

Q: How well are you able to follow the Browns?

Murray: I can follow them pretty much as well as if I were in the States. The games are all available through one means or another. There are always online streams and Sky Sports have been showing the NFL for a number of years, so I can usually see every game plus a lot of the rest of the league. The Browns being pretty bad also works in my favour, as they don't get primetime games so they kick off at 6 p.m. here. The Browns also have quite a vibrant online community so there's always a lot of discussion going on. None of my friends are Browns fans so it means I don't have to bore them with the Browns various woes! I feel pretty lucky, to be honest, I spoke to a Browns fan here in his 40s that told me he had to follow them through a magazine subscription before coverage was expanded here.

Q: How much interest is there in American football in Scotland (or American sports in general)?

Murray: An ever-increasing amount. People used to call it rugby with pads, insinuating that it wasn't as tough or as manly a sport, but they're much more interested to hear about it these days. The massive increase in coverage has helped. It's shown on Sky Sports, the BBC and Channel 4 and, of course, they have the International Series down at Wembley (in London) now, which I think has been a big factor in increasing the fan base of the NFL. There's been a concerted effort by the league to broaden its viewership over here and it's definitely paying off. It takes a lot less effort and money now to be an NFL fan than it used to, so people are picking it up all the time. It's not going to overtake soccer as the No. 1 sport, but there's room for a substantial fan base. I think it's seen as a lot less esoteric now.

Talking Browns Football with Scotland's Sad Factory

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Sunday, April 21 2013 2:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, April 21 2013 10:47 AM

There's a lot less interest in other American sports. Obviously the games over here are helping the NBA, but other sports are a blip on the radar.

Q: What made you decide to start The Factory of Sadness?

Murray: To vent mostly! I wanted somewhere to record my thoughts and engage with a larger Browns audience. I have always enjoyed writing and had a lot of spare time on my hands so decided to get stuck in. The Browns have a very good blogging community and I wanted to be a part of that, and I love Twitter. It's such an easy way to note down thoughts and get a quick response on whether I'm talking crazy or not. It lets me feel more like a Browns fan and less like I'm on my own with this team.

Q: Have you run into any other Cleveland fans in your daily life?

Murray: I haven't really, I have met one or two, but those were through football connections. Probably my most memorable encounter was with an Ohio State fan. I used to be a tour guide and a guy was wearing a Buckeyes T-shirt on one of my tours and I chatted to him about Terrelle Pryor's misdemeanors for a bit. It turned out he was British, his daughter was studying abroad there and he wasn't actually much of a football fan, but he was polite enough to humour me! It was a bit surreal coming across the OSU logo in a Scottish country house.

Q: Have you ever been to Cleveland for a game (or have plans to visit)?

Murray: No, I've never been to the U.S. but it's something I hope to do in the future. I have friends who live in America, so I hope to combine a visit to see them with a trip to see the Browns and the Cavs. I'd love to see how quick Kyrie Irving is in the flesh, and the Dawg Pound seems like something that has to be seen to be believed.

Q: Which off-season move by the Browns do you think was the best?

Talking Browns Football with Scotland's Sad Factory

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Sunday, April 21 2013 2:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, April 21 2013 10:47 AM

Murray: They have made a bunch of really solid moves, but the ones that stand out have to be the coordinator hires. I still can't really believe the guys they got. Norv Turner has been one of the best offensive minds in the NFL for a very long time and fits very well with the offensive personnel here. I had thought the only way he ended up in the AFC North was with the Ravens, so it's exciting to have him on the Browns staff. His days as an NFL head coach are probably done as well, so hopefully he'll be here for a while, unless he gets tempted by a college offer.

It's the same excitement with Ray Horton. I love everything he's said about being aggressive and "big guys that can run and small guys that can hit." I think Arizona probably made a mistake hiring Bruce Arians over him, and I don't expect him to be here more than a couple seasons before getting a shot at a head coach position.

Together it's the polar opposite of the tentative attitude that the Browns play callers displayed last year.

Q: Why is it finally going to be different under Jimmy Haslam, Joe Banner and Rob Chudzinski? (*Editor's note: Murray answered this question before the news broke that Haslam was being investigated by the FBI and the IRS.*)

Murray: There's a focus there that doesn't seem to have been there in the past. There's a lot more doing and a lot less hoping. Haslam wants the best of everything, and Banner is helping to shape that productively. The biggest thing is that they are putting guys in positions to succeed, from the players right up to the front office. As I said, the roster fits very well with Turner and Horton, and I don't think Chud could have hoped for two better heads next to him.

In the front office they've added Brent Stehlik and have brought in Ray Farmer, a general manager candidate, to help take some weight off of Mike Lombardi. Everybody that has been brought in has a role to play in shaping the team, and there is a collective viewpoint of being aggressive and bringing the fight to teams. (Former team president) Mike Holmgren was very happy for things to happen organically, whereas these guys want to catalyze things more. They are hell bent on doing everything they can to make this a competitive, successful team. The days of absent leadership are behind us now.

Q: The NFL Draft is later this month. What should the Browns do with their first-round pick?

Murray: I really want them to take [Barkevious Mingo](#) . I think he offers the best impact with the pick and can be an instant contributor as well as having huge upside. He explodes off the ball and is a really disruptive player. He didn't quite have the stats this year, partly due to the role he played, but he still showed that he can be a big-time player.

I have seen almost universal opinion that they'll take a corner, but for me a pass rusher is a more impactful player. We saw in the playoffs that teams with very good secondaries still struggle if they can't create a consistent rush. Rushing the passer has been a problem for the Browns ever since they came back so I'd load up there and let Horton rip. Plus his name is BARKevious, it's destiny.

Q: OK, but this is Cleveland and the Browns rarely do what they should, so what will the Browns do with their first-round pick?

Murray: Trade out. Banner has been very vocal about the lack of picks as well as his preference for trading down rather than up. I've also heard that they're very eager to add a second-round pick due to the depth of this class at several positions. The sixth pick is looking like it could offer several potential trade partners depending on how the draft plays out, so I'm hoping that if they go this route that they'll be able to take advantage of a desperate team behind them.

I do think in terms of players in consideration that cornerback is probably at the top of the list. It's the most obvious hole in the team. I would be quite happy if they were to drop back to No. 12 and take [Xavier Rhodes](#) there, but trading back opens up a ton of possibilities. If they can't pull one off then I think they'll probably snap up [Dee Milliner](#) if he's there.

Q: How do you like the Browns chances this year?

Murray: I'm feeling pretty good about them. If Turner can get Brandon Weeden playing

Talking Browns Football with Scotland's Sad Factory

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Sunday, April 21 2013 2:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, April 21 2013 10:47 AM

consistently well, then I think it's going to be a big improvement this season. The play calling is going to be so much better, Chudzinski could stay at home on game day and he'd still be a huge improvement on (former coach) Pat Shurmur. The AFC North is in a state of flux at the moment, and I think the Browns have a shot at being competitive in the division for the first time in too long. There's a lot of variables obviously, but I reckon that they should be looking at .500 for the season. This could be the year of Holmgren's "big jump" and I think there's an opportunity to have a winning season, but I'll be happy with much better football, over six wins and beating the Ravens!

Q: You are also an Arsenal fan. So, Arsene Wenger: Stay or Go?

Murray: Stay. He's become a punching bag for the fans and gets pretty much all the grief for the team's current woes, but it's disingenuous to pin every ill on him. There have been some missed opportunities in the past few years, but I find the idea that he doesn't spend money available to him due to his ego ridiculous. It's been such a consistent model that it's clearly coming from above and has been dictated by the financing of the stadium. The club may not have won anything for a number of years now, but he has maintained a level of success that is impressive with the parameters in which he's had to work.

Hopefully the club is nearing the end of its period of austerity (the stadium is mostly paid off and new commercial deals are due) so there should be better days ahead.

Q: If the Browns were a Premier League team they would be ...

Murray: That's a difficult one. I think West Ham are a good match. Both are blue collar teams with proud histories but have been lagging behind local divisional rivals for some time now.

Thanks again to Murray for taking the time to talk with us and be sure to check out his blog. And Murray, if you ever make it to Cleveland, the first round is on us.