



Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, yet expecting different results. I don't know how many aspects of Cleveland Browns football that could apply to, but the easiest thesis to write on the Cleveland Browns is that they've never gotten it right at quarterback, and for that reason alone, nothing else could have ever gone right.

Look, that's obviously a way to over-simplify 15 years of dysfunction, but it's a good place to start, and one cannot possibly overstate how imperative it is to have a functional quarterback, in order to have a successful franchise.

People that don't follow closely enough call it an obsession with finding a quarterback, but the rest of us understand; finding that cog is the beginning the middle, and the end in the NFL.

The Browns have had 15 draft days, and have come away with zero successful franchise quarterbacks, despite having the first overall pick twice, and few drafts without an opportunity to make a selection in the Top 10. Those high picks have been made available to them, because they fail to win enough ball games to drop down much further; it's a matter of cause and effect.

Because they do not have a quarterback, the effect of 11 and 12 loss seasons put them into advantageous draft positions.

While they haven't exactly whiffed on every top pick they've made in the last 15 years, they haven't even stumbled backwards into anyone above average to play the position, on draft day, and that might just violate some laws of probability.

Even in hindsight, it's difficult to really say what they could have done differently. Coaches

make NFL players what they are in a lot of cases; that's why we have what we refer to as busts.

Sometimes, it is bad scouting or a player's failure to adapt to the NFL game, but the head coach-quarterback tandem gets mentioned a lot for a reason.

It's a real live thing, but bad teams miss out on that good fit often, if only because they call the wrong name on draft day.

That could result in a 2-year mistake or a 5-year mistake, depending on how vested an owner is on a player, or how well a team might be assembled around even the right guy.

The latter is the type of mistake that might never reveal itself, since you can only play the scenarios out in your head.

In fact, the Browns reboot begins with one of those questions. Over the years, various names are always interesting to wonder about, what could have been?

In some cases, like New England for example, it's just as easy to wonder what might not have been?

Is there another sixth-round guy, like Tom Brady, who is now gone and forgotten because he never get his chance in a bad system?

What about Dr. Discount-Double-Check, are there a few out there that would have benefitted in the same way from 4 years backing up a legend?

Here's a look at the Browns, since the reboot, who they took with their first picks, who they could have had, and who was never available to them, speaking strictly in terms of quarterbacks.

### 1999

**Who They Took:** Tim Couch

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Peyton Manning, Brian Griese, Charlie Batch, Matt Hasselbeck, Jim Druckenmiller, Jake Plummer, Tony Banks, Jeff Lewis

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Donovan McNabb, Daunte Culpepper, Shaun King, Brock Huard, Aaron Brooks

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Akili Smith, Cade McNown

While it was so nice of the NFL to award them the first overall pick, after not giving them ample to time to build a franchise in the first place, it sure would have been nice to have it happen when more franchise-types were available. So, no Peyton Manning. No Jake Plummer. They didn't even have a chance to nab Tony Banks, Chip's cousin, in 1996, but even after seeing Tony's career with the Rams and Ravens play out, I'm not sure that miss was so devastating.

Tim Couch may have actually been the right pick here, considering the Browns had their pick of the litter, but it's hard to overlook all the great things Donovan McNabb accomplished with Andy Reid in Philly. I'm really not sure Chris Palmer doesn't screw up what we know to be a great career for McNabb, and it's possible Couch would have thrived in Reid's system with a more ready-made team around him in Flip-a-delphia.

### 2000

**Who They Took:** Courtney Brown

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Not applicable

**Who They COuld Have Taken:** Chad Pennington, Chris Redman, Marc Bulger, Tom Brady, Tim Rattay

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Giovanni Carmazzi, Tee Martin, Spergeon Wynn

In 1999, they were awarded the first overall pick; the following year they earned it, with a 2-14 inaugural season. Courtney Brown, the insanely talented defensive end from Penn State, didn't seem like a terrible choice at the time, and quarterback would have been a silly fulfillment of a non-need, considering Couch was only in Year 2, without anything with a pulse to complement him on offense. It might have been a good idea to take the best offensive player available, Alabama's Chris Samuels to protect Couch's blind side, but they had to stop the other team with someone other than Jamir Miller.

I have to acknowledge that Brady was an outlier that fell into the perfect storm at New England, with a seldom-mentioned year behind Drew Bledsoe under the charge of Bill Belichick and Hall of Fame-caliber assistants, so forget about the 199th pick for a second. Marshall's Chad Pennington had question marks coming out of a small school, and the same could be said for Chris Redman from Louisville.

Neither had spectacular NFL careers, but Pennington might have been a great fit, if the Browns went another route in Year 1, maybe Edgerrin James or Torry Holt.

Who knows?

It is difficult to look back at the Chris Palmer era, and make things much better than they were, even in the hypothetical world of “what if”.

### 2001

**Who They Took:** Gerard Warren

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Michael Vick

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Drew Brees, Sage Rosenfels, AJ Feeley

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Quincy Carter, Marques Tuiasosopo, Chris Weinke, Jesse Palmer

There were question marks surrounding Vick. There were question marks surrounding Brees, too. And my, what a drop-off after Brees, who wouldn't be all that special if he didn't find that perfect situation in New Orleans after San Diego chose to let him walk and Miami wouldn't offer him a contract in free agency.

He might be the very best example of what happens when you marry a quarterback and a head coach that together far exceed the sum of the two parts on their own.

For a third overall pick, Gerard Warren stunk. For an NFL journeyman, Warren was adequate, after being traded, with most of the Browns front seven, to Denver for Reuben Droughns in 2005.

### 2002

**Who They Took:** William Green

**Who They Couldn't Take:** David Carr, Joey Harrington

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Josh McCown, David Garrard, Rohan Davey

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Randy Fasani, Kurt Kitner, Craig Nall, JT O'Sullivan, Steve Bellisari

William Green, the running back from Boston College, ran them right into the playoffs. They couldn't have Carr or Harrington, after a fairly successful first season under Butch Davis. Truth be told, with Couch and Holcomb, the quarterback position didn't seem to be an overwhelming need, and Bruce Arians made it work.

Josh McCown started on a lot of bad teams that no one cared about for the better part of a decade, and lost his job to unproven rookies that never really outplayed him. David Garrard forced Byron Leftwich out in Jacksonville, and there was a consensus that Davey could have thrived, if ever given a starting nod, but who knows? Nobody ever really thought that of Randy Fasani, except maybe the Panthers, who took him in the 5th round.

### 2003

**Who They Took:** Jeff Faine

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Carson Palmer, Byron Leftwich, Kyle Boller

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Rex Grossman

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Dave Ragone, Chris Simms, Seneca Wallace, Ken Dorsey

For what it's worth, Jeff Faine was a solid center, and it's a shame the Browns let him go in favor of a guy that never made it to the second day of non-contact drills in 2006. The Browns had every reason to believe Kelly Holcomb was their guy at this point; he took them to the playoffs and set post-season passing records in a time before the numbers all became so meaningless. Palmer was great when he was young, before that injury in the 2004 Playoffs, but he was never an option for Davis and the Browns anyways.

People forget how great Grossman was at Florida. He took the Bears to the Super Bowl in 2006, but his overall career is generally considered a dud. I can't help but think, there might not have been a worse situation for him to walk into than Chicago, and Lovie Smith's coaching staff. He might have jelled with Cleveland, but quarterback didn't feel like a priority. Did you see what Tim Couch did to the Pittsburgh Steelers in prime time?

### 2004

**Who They Took:** Kellen Winslow II

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Eli Manning, Phillip Rivers

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Ben Roethlisberger, Matt Schaub

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** JP Losman, Craig Krenzel

Oh good, Jeff Garcia! The nation was at war with someone in the Middle East and Winslow

made a very verbal proclamation that he was a soldier. He sure didn't do much to demonstrate he was a football player, suffering a broken leg early in his rookie season on special teams, then prolonging his return to the field while showboating on his motorcycle. To be fair, he never did much to warrant showboating on the football field, so he might have felt obligated to get it out of his system on the bike.

He bounced back in 2007, but speaking of outliers, that whole season was just that.

We know the story with Roethlisberger. He went 13-0 as a rookie, then won the Super Bowl in his second season. A few brushes with the law that were chalked up more as violations of morals than anything else may have tainted who the Miami of Ohio product is as a man, but there's no denying he's the type of quarterback that can help even the worst teams wins. He has spent his career making the Browns one of the worst teams in the game, just about twice a year, since the Browns passed on him for Private Winslow.

Schaub has never won a playoff game, but neither has anyone the Browns have drafted since '99.

## 2005

**Who They Took:** Braylon Edwards

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Alex Smith

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Aaron Rodgers, Jason Campbell, Kyle Orton, Matt Cassel, Ryan Fitzpatrick

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Charlie Frye, Andrew Walter, David Greene, Stefan Lefors, Derek Anderson

Braylon Edwards wasn't always a bad guy, then he dropped the good guy act when the going got tough in 2008. He went from being the head cheerleader during the playing of Hang On Sloopy to being a Michigan Man, who couldn't get a fair shake in Ohio. If he could have hung on to the ball, the Browns would have hung on to him long enough for Cleveland to praise him for upsetting a member of the Lebrontrourage in 2008.

Instead, he developed a New York essence that a Midwestern simpleton like myself couldn't understand, but I didn't grow up in Detroit like Edwards did.

Aaron Rodgers sat in that green room for a long time, then he sat for the Green and Yellow for a

long time. Maybe, if he doesn't sit behind Brett Favre for four years, he amounts to what Brady Quinn amounted to. Maybe, it never mattered. Plus, the Browns got their guy in Charlie Frye, which was great because he grew up rooting for the team and he went to Akron.

Oh, and this was the Trent Dilfer; I'm glad they rolled the dice with the worst Super Bowl Champion starting quarterback of all-time.

11 touchdown, 12 picks, 9 fumbles; and a great desk job on ESPN that allows him to call the organization dysfunctional at every turn.

I don't even care that he's probably not lying.

### 2006

**Who They Took:** Kamerion Wimbley

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Vince Young, Matt Leinart, Jay Cutler

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Kellen Clemens, Tavaris Jackson, Charlie Whitehurst

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Brody Croyle, Ingle Martin, Omar Jacobs

Again, they didn't get an awful player in Kamerion Wimbley, the pass rusher from Florida State.

He might have gotten better with a change of scenery, when the Browns sent him to Oakland, but I wouldn't say the was necessarily a miss.

The Browns spent 2006 figuring out what they had in Frye, but he ultimately ended up being a miss.

This draft didn't yield any better options. Jay Cutler and Kellen Clemens are still in the league, neither with the team that drafted them.

### 2007

**Who They Took:** Joe Thomas

**Who They Couldn't Take:** JaMarcus Russell

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Brady Quinn, Kevin Kolb

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** John Beck, Drew Stanton, Trent Edwards

No complaints on the selection of Joe Thomas, none.

The Browns did need a quarterback, and there wasn't one to be had, so they pissed away a 2008 draft pick to get the Cowboys' first-rounder in 2007. That guy, Brady Quinn, was the favorite for them at #3, according to beat reporter Mary Kay Cabot in a mock draft on ESPN.

Imagine how bad things would be if Phil Savage listened to MKC, and they didn't even come away from that draft with Thomas.

Sometimes, you have to believe this team wouldn't know good fortune if it hit them in the face. Derek Anderson led them to a 10-6 season in 2007.

Quinn was an unknown commodity, and both could have brought value, but the Browns did nothing but discover that neither was very good.

Kolb ended up being a nice little mirage, filling in for McNabb with the Eagles, but was never ready for prime time, as Arizona fans learned the hard way.

## 2008

**Who They Took:** Beau Bell

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Matt Ryan, Joe Flacco, Brian Brohm, Chad Henne, Kevin O'Connell

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Dennis Dixon, Josh Johnson, Matt Flynn

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** John David Booty, Erik Ainge, Colt Brennan

To acquire the pick to get Quinn, Shaun Rogers, and Corey Williams, the Browns basically conceded this draft. The first guy they took, Bell, was never a factor.

Matt Ryan and Joe Flacco have won playoff games, even though neither is exactly the first name that pops into your head when you think "franchise quarterback". I doubt there's many pieces of tape on the Couch jersey below either one of these names, if the Browns had the pick and taken one of them in the draft they basically did not participate in.

As for the rest of the crop, Henne and Johnson were the only ones to play for any significant

stretch. Flynn played enough mop up time to pull the wool over everyone's eyes with great personnel in Green Bay, but couldn't beat Russell Wilson or Terrelle Pryor to captain his own ship. The Browns missed out on him, but to paraphrase Office Space, they didn't exactly miss out on him.

### 2009

**Who They Took:** Alex Mack

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Matt Stafford, Mark Sanchez\*, Josh Freeman\*

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Stephen McGee

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Pat White, Rhett Bomar, Tom Bradstater, Curtis Painter

Alex Mack was a good pick for Eric Mangini and his puppet GM in 2009. They traded down to get him in the right slot. Once they won a game in 2008, they were out of the Matthew Stafford sweepstakes. The next quarterback taken, Mark Sanchez, was taken with their pick, and no one in Cleveland regrets passing on him. Well, no one would, if anyone from 2009 was still around.

As for the rest of what was available, I'm not sure how to properly transcribe the sound of loud fart that probably smells as bad as it sounds.

### 2010

**Who They Took:** Joe Haden

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Sam Bradford

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Tim Tebow, Jimmy Clausen, Colt McCoy

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Mike Kafka, John Skelton

Tim Tebow won a playoff game, but wasn't invited back to camp with Denver the next summer. Sam Bradford played on a 6-10 team that would have made the playoffs, with a Week 17 win three years ago. Colt McCoy was the best quarterback available to them, and they took him. It didn't work out, in the end, but at some point, it looked like it might have.

How do I condemn this draft, when there obviously weren't answers? I don't, but I have to list this as part of the overall 0-fer, even if you draw it up on the stat sheet like a walk in baseball. If you walk four times, you still fail to get a hit.

## 2011

**Who They Took:** Phil Taylor

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Cam Newton, Jake Locker\*, Blaine Gabbert\*, Christian Ponder\*

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Andy Dalton, Colin Kaepernick, Ryan Mallett, TJ Yates

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Ricky Stanzi, Tyrod Taylor, Greg McElroy

We're getting to the point, where a lot of these grades would have to be incomplete, but Newton is certainly looking like what you expect a #1 overall pick to be; where were guys like him when the Browns were at the top of the draft in the beginning? Locker, Gabbert, and Ponder could have been had, but the front office chose to move down and take the big defensive lineman from Baylor. He wasn't a terrible selection, but Dalton has been to the playoffs, Kaepernick took his team to a Super Bowl from a backup role, and Yates has won a playoff game.

Let's be honest, none of it matters, when it comes to 2011. Pat Shurmur could have screwed up Montana and Young.

## 2012

**Who They Took:** Trent Richardson

**Who They Couldn't Take:** Andrew Luck, Robert Griffin III

**Who They Could Have Taken:** Ryan Tannehill, Russell Wilson, Nick Foles, Kirk Cousins

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Brandon Weeden

Luck and Griffin both took their teams to the playoffs as rookies, but the Shurmur's Browns just weren't quite bad enough to land either of them. Wilson is poised to play January football in Seattle for the second straight year, while Tannehill, Foles, and Cousins have a good chance to start playoff games in their second seasons.

Brandon Weeden is having a lot of fun playing pro football and getting trapped under flags, but it didn't take him long to lose his job to Jason Campbell and Brian Hoyer. When he shows up on the injury report, I don't completely dismiss the thought that his ailments are the result of a "shot by his own troops" type of deal. Two first round picks in 2012, but nothing to show for it on the field in 2013. Sad.

## 2013

**Who They Took:** Barkevious Mingo

**Who They Couldn't Take:** No one

**Who They Could Have Taken:** EJ Manuel, Geno Smith, Mike Glennon

**Who They Were Better Off Without:** Who knows, Matt Barkley

There were no quarterbacks taken before the Browns took Mingo with the sixth pick last April, and none should have been. EJ Manuel might be an upgrade over anything they have going on right now, but you never know. Geno Smith is part of the dysfunctional Jets family that will host the Browns on Sunday, and you go back and forth from being sold on him, to wondering if he should be in a different line of work. Credit Weeden for showing conclusive results in this realm.

We don't know what 2014 will bring, but Browns fans have to hope it won't be another draft that doesn't net them a franchise quarterback for the 16th straight season.