

At Least He Can Spell

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, January 22 2007 7:00 PM -

The Browns shocked their fanbase this weekend by naming Rob Chudzinski their offensive coordinator. As evidenced by my email inbox, most fans expected a respected offensive name to be brought in to assist the offensively challenged Romeo Crennel, not the still wet behind the ears Chudzinski. Predictably, the Plain Dealer talking heads voiced their disapproval this week. But our Gary Benz likes this hire, and explains why in his latest.



In the parthenon that is great quotes in Cleveland Browns history, most people will recall, “there’s a gleam, men” from Mary Schottenheimer and “mad dog in a meat market” from Schottenheimer, again, in describing Mike Junkin, an oft-injured linebacker from Duke who lasted exactly three years in the NFL. To those we can now add what hopefully won’t be just as ignominious: “not a single misspelling in his presentation. It was really organized.” That was Browns GM Phil Savage explaining some of the rationale behind the hiring of new offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski. Who knew that the ability to use spell check was so high on the list of requirements?

The hiring of Chudzinski has garnered a fair amount of negative publicity among Cleveland’s main stream media, mainly because of Chudzinski’s inexperience. For example, both Bud Shaw and Tony Grossi at the Plain Dealer, in amazingly similar columns ([here](#) and [here](#)), noted that Chudzinski’s hiring continues the “on-the-job training mentality in Berea.”

Grossi and Shaw may be technically right but to that we’d ask, what were the alternatives? If Shaw had his way, the Browns would have hired long-time assistant (and failed former head coach) Dan Henning for the job. Grossi didn’t say but we got the distinct impression that if he were in charge, Lindy Infante would no longer be retired. If the Browns had gone with another re-tread (like Crennel) that would have received its own share of criticism that the Browns aren’t nearly as innovative as, say, the Jets or the Saints or, God forbid, the Steelers, all of whom turned over their entire franchises to young, relatively inexperienced assistants.

Actually, the hiring of Chudzinski isn’t so much innovative as it is the continuation of a trend that Savage started with last year’s free agent signings: brining in folks who truly understand what the Cleveland Browns mean to this community. Chudzinski was reared in Toledo (a highly partisan Browns town, despite its proximity to Detroit) and is a former Browns coach. Our guess is that in addition to his spelling skills, what sealed the deal for Savage was the

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fact that Chudzinski actually wanted to be here, as opposed to simply enhancing his resume by taking the almost certain promotion he would have gotten under the aforementioned Schottenheimer in San Diego.

What we like most about Chudzinski is his age. He strikes us as the kind of up and coming coach, a head coach in the making in fact, which the Browns have been reluctant to hire in the past. Almost no one gives head coach Romeo Crennel much of a chance in the long term. He may survive next year but his coaching days are numbered either way. We like the fact that Savage is trying to round out the staff with young coaches that have the energy, fire and drive to be head coaches in the NFL. If/when the Browns finally cut ties with Crennel it will be far less disruptive if the job goes to a talented assistant already on staff and not another lifelong assistant.

In this regard, Chudzinski fits nicely into the mode of Todd Grantham, the Browns defensive coordinator, a young, energetic coach with a strong personality who seems to be moving his charges in the right direction. The Browns defense last year was pitiful, but this was due mostly to injuries and talent deficit. At least they looked like they knew what they were supposed to be doing on most every play, even if they couldn't fully execute the commands.

The only trepidation we have whatsoever with Chudzinski is the same trepidation we'd have with whoever would have been hired: the task is so daunting it could very well swallow even the most veteran of coaches. The consensus seems to be that the Browns have some talent on offense, mainly in the form of Kellen Winslow, Jr. and Braylon Edwards. But it's so hard to judge because there is so little talent on this team in the first place even average players have the chance to stand out as the next great thing.

Winslow likely will be fine, particularly under Chudzinski who knows him well. As for Edwards, he's a much bigger mystery. Whether fair or not, Chudzinski's effectiveness next year will be measured, in part, on his ability to reach Edwards and turn a budding malcontent me-first Terrell Owens wannabe into a team-oriented top-tier receiver.

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But in actuality, we need not wait until next season to gauge Chudzinski's effectiveness. His ability to lay out his philosophy and identify the kinds of players necessary to execute it is absolutely critical to this off-season both in terms of the kinds of free agents that are pursued and the kinds of players that will be drafted. Chudzinski indicated that he believes in a run-first type of offense, which has always made sense in Cleveland. That may very well signal that Oklahoma running back Adrian Peterson is at the top of their draft board. For anyone who watched the success that Reggie Bush had in New Orleans this past season, drafting someone like Peterson makes incredible sense. But past being prologue, a defensive tackle will likely be their first pick.

It's understandable that some aren't pleased with Chudzinski as the choice to run this moribund offense. But at this juncture and with a team so far from being competitive it often looks like it's playing in a different league, taking a calculated gamble on a hard-charging assistant and not on a well-worn assistant was hardly the worse decision the Browns could have made.