

The Orange Pants Solution

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

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There are those who believe that building a successful football team is a thoughtful process of selecting the proper executive leadership and then carefully evaluating talent and acquiring it to fit your system.

Cute.

Problem is, the Browns have tried that, and - for the past, say, 20 years - that dog don't hunt. We've cocked up every draft since First Manassas, obliterated the careers of up-and-coming assistant coaches who we thought were ready to be a combination of P.T. Barnum and Captain Picard, and scrotum-twisted a fan base as loyal as a hungry dog with short-term memory loss.

Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. In other words, Browns football.

To those silly folks who still endorse logic and preach patience and the perseverance of wisdom, I say "balderdash." I've discovered a sure way to turn around the Browns' fortunes and perhaps rescue Cleveland from its economic purgatory.

Ready?

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Orange pants.

Yes, gang, it's that simple. Since we've learned it doesn't matter who's in charge, how much money the team spends in free agency, how much study it puts into the draft, or what poor Dickensian soul is burdened with the title of "head coach," by process of elimination, we're left with orange pants.

Can I get an "Hallelujah"?

No?

Well, grab your socks and read on, my tortured friend.

If you were to try to find a moment in Browns history when we swerved off the space-time continuum (much like that fateful moment in *Back to the Future Part II* when old Biff gave young Biff the sports almanac), you'd eventually travel back to the mid-1970s. It was then that we somehow transformed from football's most respected franchise to the bloated Jaycees pork-chop supper we now witness almost every Sunday.

The Browns were a playoff team in 1971 and 1972, then competitive in 1973 before age and some sketchy personnel decisions (take a bow, Mike Phipps) caught up with them. They went 4-10 in '74 - only the second losing record in the team's 29-year history - and longtime Paul Brown assistant Nick Skorich stepped down after four years as head coach. Subsequently, fiery Forrest Gregg - often wearing plaid checkered pants that would have gotten him shot through the neck by a high-powered rifle in any other decade - was handed the reins.

But all these details are insignificant. What matters here is that in 1975 - right around the time Captain and Tennille were cool and two different wacky women tried to pop a cap in Gerald Ford's ass - the Browns underwent a wardrobe junta.

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For the first 30 years of their existence, their uniform choices were as simple as developing a sitcom for FOX: white pants with either white or brown jerseys. But with the country in the midst of a cultural revolution and with a myriad of hallucinogenic drugs coursing through its veins, the Browns responded by LSD-ing up their look. They swapped their fascist gray facemasks for white ones and added - wait for it - orange pants to replace their white ones.

Thus, for the first time, we were introduced to the delicious candy-corn combination of brown jerseys and orange pants. Take that, Establishment.

Now, here's the point where you may say, "Whatchoo talkin' 'bout, Willis? Didn't the Browns then go 3-11 in 1975, the worst record in their history at the time?"

Aha - you've reached the creamy center of the Twinkie, constant reader.

Yes, the '75 Browns were indeed a wide-awake nightmare, perhaps the very cracked-out traveling salesman who sired the bastardized franchise we know today. But dig this: wearing white jerseys and orange pants for each of their seven road games, the Browns went 0-7. Wearing brown jerseys and orange pants for all seven games at home, they went 3-4. Granted, the fabled orange pants were in the mix for every game (and a team's home record is expected to better than its road mark), but put simply, a bad team became bearable when the orange pants were combined with their true soul mates, the brown jerseys. Thus was born the Lone Ranger/Tonto merger of Browns' uniform history.

Doesn't sound all that persuasive? Well, just hang in there for a couple more crackling paragraphs.

Since the Browns' wardrobe equivalent of the birth-control pill in '75 through the conclusion of the 2009 season, they posted an overall record of 220-290-1, a winning percentage of .432. (Let's not focus on how cosmically that blows for the moment and just use it as a baseline comparison point.)

The most common uniform combination of this era was the white pants/white jerseys package

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(219 games), yet the Browns were less successful in this subset than they were overall, going 93-125-1 (.427). Keep in mind, this record encompasses the lone long-term bright spot in this never-ending Ken Burns mini-series of futility: Marty Schottenheimer's overachieving teams of the late 1980s.

Next up is the traditional brown jerseys/white pants combo, and this was even worse (59-84, .413). When you focus on just the brown jerseys, things get a little better: 87-104 (.456), but when you zero in on just the white jerseys, things get even worse: 132-184-1 (.418). More revealing, in games in which the Browns wore white pants over that 32-season period, their winning percentage was just .421 (153-211-1).

Clearly, these aren't the droids we're looking for.

Of all the single-category comparisons, including the creamsicle orange jerseys (1-2) and the poopy brown nickers (2-6), only one stands out as a relative success.

Yes, friends, I'm talkin' 'bout pants. *Orange* pants.

Since 1975, when the Browns have worn orange pants in a game, they hold a downright almost-respectable record of 65-73 for a winning percentage of .471.

They were the only "pants option" (a term, incidentally, that is also used to describe the dress code at Progressive Insurance) for nine years, then were abandoned for a reversion to the white pants of the team's glory days. They made a brief nostalgic reappearance for three games in 2003 and then once again in 2004, but otherwise have remained in the back of the Browns' dusty closet along with Otto Graham's leather helmets, Paul Brown's fedoras, and Tim Couch's talent - still in the wrapper.

I can see hands raising in protest. "Wait," you might be thinking, "since the orange pants were primarily worn in a short window of time, doesn't that just reflect the success of that particular era? In this case, the Kardiak Kids years? So doesn't the success in the orange pants just mean that there were more talented players in that era than in the others?"

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All great questions, Pumpkin Patch. But check this out:

The Browns' overall record in the "Clockwork Orange" era between 1975 and 1983 was only 64-69 (.481). Better than the overall record from '75 to '09, sure, but really no more appealing than the 1984-1995 white or brown jerseys/white pants/non-expansion era (95-103-1, .480).

And here comes the fun part:

Of all the Browns' uniform combinations since 1975, only one boasts a winning record. Three guesses and the first two don't count.

Yup - brown jerseys/orange pants is the winner with a 28-18 mark and a blazing .609 winning percentage.

That's Yahtzee, bitches!

But of course, there's always one doubting Thomas. "Hang on," he says. "Didn't they wear those mostly at home? So shouldn't their record naturally be higher in that category anyway?"

Yes and yes. But even in this case it's abnormal. Wearing brown and orange at home between '75 and '83, the Browns were 22-11 (.667) - dramatically better than wearing white and orange at home in this era (16-17, .485). And in brown and orange on the road, the Browns were 6-7 (.462), much better than their overall road record between 1975 and 1983 (26-41, .388) and their best road-record combo of the past 35 years.

"But wait," you might say, "didn't the Browns lose both times they tried the brown/orange combo in recent years?"

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Indeed. On *Monday Night Football* just before Christmas in 2003, the 4-8 Browns hosted the 9-3 St. Louis Rams and were clearly overmatched, falling behind by 16 points at halftime. But as the magic of the brown and orange threads began to kick in, the Browns came to life, pulling to within six points in the fourth quarter and falling just shy of pulling an amazing Kardiak Kids-style comeback victory before what remained of a national audience.

The other occasion occurred the following November at home in a miserable loss to the Steelers. Like any study of the Browns since the 1970s, all games against Pittsburgh are dismissed for their tendency to be statistical and emotional abominations.

By now, I'm sure you'll agree this is an option worth exploring.

Admittedly, there's a potential down side. Fellow football fans who don't appreciate our love for apricot activewear may scoff at us and call our team ugly and hard to look at. So in that sense, nothing will change - except that the Browns may actually start to play well.

Quite frankly, what do we have to lose? Our current mascot is an elf. With pointy ears. Who looks like Dennis Kucinich.

This isn't about trying to win Miss Teen Ohio or pretending to be rust-belt fashionistas. Let's get over ourselves and start winning some damn football games.

Listen to me now and believe me later. Break out the orange pants and let the good times roll.

CLEVELAND BROWNS UNIFORM BREAKDOWN: 1975-2009

OVERALL RECORD: 220-290-1 (.432)

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Home: 124-130-1 (.488)

Road: 96-160 (.375)

BY COMBINATION:

BROWN JERSEYS/ORANGE PANTS: 28-20 (.583)

Home: 22-13 (.629)

Road: 6-7 (.462)

WHITE JERSEYS/WHITE PANTS: 93-125-1 (.427)

Home: 39-27-1 (.590)

Road: 54-98 (.355)

BROWN JERSEYS/WHITE PANTS: 59-84 (.413)

Home: 47-70 (.402)

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Road: 12-14 (.462)

WHITE JERSEYS/ORANGE PANTS: 37-53 (.411)

Home: 16-18 (.471)

Road: 21-35 (.375)

ORANGE JERSEYS/WHITE PANTS: 1-2 (.333)

Home: 1-2 (.333)

Road: N/A

WHITE JERSEYS/BROWN PANTS: 2-6 (.250)

Home: N/A

Road: 2-6 (.250)

BY INDIVIDUAL ITEM:

ORANGE PANTS: 65-73 (.471)

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Home: 38-31(.551)

Road: 27-42 (.391)

BROWN JERSEYS: 87-104 (.456)

Home: 69-83 (.454)

Road: 18-21 (.462)

WHITE PANTS: 152-211-1 (.421)

Home: 87-99-1 (.468)

Road: 68-118 (.366)

WHITE JERSEYS: 132-184-1 (.418)

Home: 55-45-1 (.545)

Road: 77-139 (.357)

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ORANGE JERSEYS: 1-2 (.333)

Home: 1-2 (.333)

Road: N/A

BROWN PANTS: 2-6 (.250)

Home: N/A

Road: 2-6 (.333)