

Yesteryear: 2001 @ Jacksonville

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

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The Jacksonville Jaguars have only been around for fifteen years, but due to their initial placement in the AFC Central Division the Browns got to know them well right off the bat- too well. The early years of the Browns-Jags series was laced with darkness for a Cleveland franchise that couldn't find a light against much of anyone.

Half of the four wins for the expansion 1995 Jags came over the Browns. In the first meeting Jacksonville came into the old Stadium and came away with a victory over a Move-doomed Cleveland team tumbling out of a 3-1 start. The Jaguars put the old Browns' lights out in the finale at the Gator Bowl by winning on a last-second field goal; one of the saddest days- maybe the saddest day, in franchise history.

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While Cleveland sat on the sidelines, Jacksonville turned into a NFL powerhouse practically from the womb. In 1996 the Jags [squeaked into the playoffs](#) at 9-7 and got all the way to the AFC title game, [beating John Elway in Mile High](#) along the way. From '96 through '99 Jacksonville, with one of the most talented rosters in the league, went 45-19 and reached the doorstep of the Super Bowl twice.

Feisty kittens when the old Browns slipped away, the Jaguars were powerful, swaggering cats when the new Browns wobbled back into the firmament in 1999. Unfortunately for the Browns, the Jags were also still members of the AFC Central. In 1999 and 2000 Cleveland lost four times to Jacksonville, all of them one-sided. On December 3, 2000 in Florida the Jags defeated the Browns 48-0 in [maybe the most lopsided game since the Return](#). Cleveland got two first downs, 53 total yards (minus-nine passing) and had the ball for 36 plays to Jacksonville's eighty.

If it seems this story has been told before, [it has](#). The Central Division was a rough neighborhood for the expansion Browns. In 1999 Jacksonville and Tennessee met in the AFC Championship Game; in 2000 the Titans had the best record in the NFL while the Ravens won the Super Bowl; and in 2001 the Steelers had the best record in the AFC while Baltimore reached the second round of the Playoffs. There were no shortage of bullies on the block, and the Jaguars were one of them.

By 2001, however, Jacksonville was beginning to weaken. Age and infirmity were eating into the core of the team. All-Pro left tackle Tony Boselli was already out with the [shoulder problems](#) that would eventually force him into early retirement, and oft-injured tailback Fred Taylor could not be counted on to carry the load on offense. Taylor had trucked the Browns for 181 yards and three touchdowns in the 48-0 massacre in late 2000 but he would not play in the meeting with Cleveland on September 30th, 2001, having been lost with a groin injury the previous week.

Jacksonville likely wouldn't need Fred Taylor to take care of Cleveland in Alltel Stadium on the warm, sunny afternoon of September 30th, 2001. The Jags were 2-0 and hadn't allowed a touchdown in decisive wins over Pittsburgh and Tennessee. Under first-year head coach Butch Davis the Browns were 1-1. After a frustrating loss to Seattle in the opener Cleveland came back from the 9/11-imposed bye week and whipped Detroit, 24-14. The Browns intercepted former teammate and Lions quarterback Ty Detmer seven times, three by rookie cornerback

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Anthony Henry.

So the Browns were looking better under their new coach, but certainly they were not at the level of the Steelers and Titans, teams the Jags had already beaten. Jacksonville had never lost to Cleveland in six tries dating back to 1995. After this game several Browns would accuse the Jags of overconfidence. Based on the previous history, they had a right to be.

But the big win over Detroit had given the young Browns a shot of confidence. They wasted little time showing their new mettle to the Jaguars. On Jacksonville's first offensive play Mark Brunell was flushed and forced a shovel pass that was intercepted by defensive tackle Orpheus Roye. It was already the tenth interception of the year by the Browns. As Roye struggled up the field rookie tackle Gerard Warren [peeled back and blindsided Brunell](#) with a vicious block. A concussed Brunell played one more series and called it a day, joining Boselli, Taylor, defensive end Tony Brackens and safety Donovan Darius [on the sideline](#)

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Warren's knockout shot set the tone for an aggressive Cleveland first half. While the defense shut down Jacksonville's depleted attack, Tim Couch and the offense dominated the football. Couch, who would complete 24-of-34 on the day, guided his charges on an epic ten-minute, 19-play, 80-yard touchdown drive in the second quarter on which the Browns converted six third downs en route to Jamel White's four-yard scoring blast. The first touchdown of the season against the Jags sandwiched around a pair of Phil Dawson field goals gave Cleveland a 13-0 halftime lead.

By halftime it was apparent to the crowd at Alltel Stadium that they were in for an unexpected tussle. Cleveland had outscored, outit and outfought the home team in every way, racking up 173 total yards and eleven first downs. The Jaguars would have to come back without their starting quarterback, top running back, franchise tackle and a tired, shorthanded defense that couldn't get off the field in the first half. Then again, these were still the Browns- and a 13-point deficit against the Browns, at home, was hardly insurmountable.

Indeed, Jacksonville surmounted the deficit with unseemly swiftness. Moments into the third quarter reserve quarterback Jonathan Quinn got the Jags onto the scoreboard with an eight-yard scoring toss to former Brown Keenan McCardell. Jacksonville was right back in it at 13-7. Jacksonville's defense then made a game-breaking play when Aaron Beasley scooped up

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a Jamel White fumble and raced forty yards for a touchdown. It was now 14-13 Jacksonville and half the third quarter hadn't even played. Order had seemingly been restored.

Cleveland's offense, so effective in the first half, lapsed into a stupor. The Browns failed to threaten for the remainder of the third quarter. Jacksonville's attack fared little better and the Jaguars nursed their one-point lead into the final period, needing only to shut down the callow Clevelanders for fifteen minutes to move to 3-0 and ahead of the pace in the rugged AFC Central, despite their long tablet of physical woes.

But the Jags weren't out of the woods by any means. Kicker Mike Hollis, who nailed the field goal to sink the Browns in the 1995 finale, flubbed an opportunity to extend the lead when he missed a 43-yarder. After a Jacksonville punt Couch got the offense back into gear, hitting five straight passes to set up Phil Dawson's thirty-yard field-goal attempt. Dawson's kick split the uprights and the Browns, surprisingly, were back in the lead at 16-14 with five minutes remaining in the game. This was exactly where Jacksonville didn't want to be- down late and needing a clutch drive without Mark Brunell, the quarterback who had led their franchise almost from birth.

Jonathan Quinn had two chances to pull out a victory. His first ended with an incomplection on fourth down. His second, with two minutes to play, turned into the Cleveland clincher when Daylon McCutcheon intercepted Quinn's pass and glided 32 yards down the near sideline for a touchdown. It was the eleventh interception of the year and it put this one in the win column: Cleveland 23, Jacksonville 14. For the first time ever the Browns had beaten the Jags- and they'd beaten them in their own back yard.

The final number was in striking contrast to the 48-0 fiasco of 2000. Ten months after absorbing perhaps the worst beating in franchise history in Jacksonville, the Browns came to the same stadium and won the game, outgaining the Jaguars 321-259 and controlling the ball for more than 35 minutes. Cleveland didn't just win- it won convincingly. Butch Davis's remodeled Browns were now 2-1, one of their perennial tormentors slain. More awaited, in what would become in its own way the most exciting season since the Return.