

Dad's Dubious Legacy

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Thursday, September 01 2011 7:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, September 02 2011 9:27 PM



As a father, you hope to pass your virtues along to your offspring. Conversely, you hope they can avoid picking up your vices and other assorted bad habits. Unfortunately, the opposite is usually true.

My son Dan, now 32 years old, is a victim of my genetics in the most unpredictable ways. He was never blessed with my innate *savoir faire*, my intellectual curiosity, my masculine charm, my virtuoso musical talents, or my superior athletic skills. Instead, he was saddled with my undying devotion to the Cleveland Browns — thereby dooming himself to a life of heartache. Poor kid.

How big a fan has he turned out to be? His dog's name is Suggs.

He and his expatriate Cleveland buddies also spend every Sunday afternoon during the NFL season exchanging insults with black-and-gold-clad inbreds at a Lake Mary, Florida, watering hole where all the day's games are shown on a wall full of wide-screen TVs, and rival fans must sit within punching distance of each other.

Dad's Dubious Legacy

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Thursday, September 01 2011 7:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, September 02 2011 9:27 PM

Last week, with the new season on the horizon, I telephoned him.

“How are you fixed for Browns jerseys?” I asked, knowing full well that only NFL-sanctioned gear is accepted by those loony fans in the pub.

“I can’t wear the Braylon [Edwards] jersey any more,” he told me. “I’ve got to wear the old [Josh] Cribbs jersey, and it’s sort of beat up.”

“How about I visit the Browns Team Shop here, buy you a new one, and mail it to you for an early Christmas gift?”

Being my son, he joyfully accepted.

“Whose jersey do you want?” I asked.

He pondered. I suppose he was torn between No. 12, No. 23 and No. 40. Being a big Madden fan, he chose the Peyton Hillis model. I should have known. (Three years ago, I also bought him a jersey. Exhibiting the keen insight we Roches have become famous for, he forsook the Joe Thomas model for the aforementioned lame-ass receiver who’s now with the Jets.)

I started taking Dan to games at old Municipal Stadium in 1990 with a gang from work, who were in the habit of buying a block of seats for one game every fall. Three or four years running, we sat in the Dawg Pound, where he immediately became familiar with the dark side of the human condition. Not only was he witness to drunken beasts in dog masks spouting language that doubtless burnt his young ears, but the first season he also became greatly infatuated with a team that often was humiliated and finished with an underpowering 3-13 record.

Looking back over the 20-odd years that Dan has been following the Browns, there hasn’t been much to cheer about. A 29-9 pounding by the hated Steelers in the 1994 playoffs (following Bill Belichick’s most successful season here); Art Modell taking the “original” team to Baltimore (but

Dad's Dubious Legacy

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Thursday, September 01 2011 7:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, September 02 2011 9:27 PM

leaving us the colors); a “rebirth” in 1999 (though it was stillborn); and one trip to the playoffs this century (under the sterling guidance of the immortal Butch Davis).

At least I have some fond memories. I owe my allegiance to the exploits of Paul Brown, Blanton Collier, Frank Ryan, Gary Collins, Jim Brown, Leroy Kelly, Dick Schafrath, Paul Warfield, Clay Matthews, Brian Sipe, Ozzie Newsome and many more. Dan’s favorite Browns players? Tim Couch, Lee Suggs, Edwards, Cribbs — none of whom will ever have to worry about posing for a bronze bust — which says something about the quality of football that Browns fans have come to accept (and even embrace).

Last season, Dan scored a ticket to the Browns-Jaguars game Nov. 21. He drove the three hours from Lake Mary to Jacksonville and saw the Browns take the upper hand for most of the game by forcing six turnovers. But the Jaguars scored with 1:05 left in the fourth quarter, thus sending Dan back south with tears in his eyes and his beloved Brownies back north with a 24-20 loss.

He often telephones me on game days. We share our thoughts on what’s transpiring (at halftime) or how disappointed we are (post-game). It’s one of the few times of the year when we really get to bond any more. He called me at halftime of the fake game against the Iggles and volunteered his thoughts.

“They’re looking pretty good this season,” he observed, despite the fact that a series of stupid mistakes had pretty much damned the team to another loss, albeit a pre-season one.

“It’s another rebuilding year,” I reminded him. “But it’s the first time in many moons that they appear to actually have a plan. The last two Tom Heckert drafts have turned up some good young players, and the front office and coach appear to be on the same page — for a change.

“They’ve still got some massive holes that have to be plugged, like at linebacker and wide receiver,” I continued. “The defensive line is having trouble protecting the boundaries, and the defensive backfield is scary. They’ve also got a whole lot of injuries, and the loss of Eric Steinbach will hurt.”

Dad's Dubious Legacy

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Thursday, September 01 2011 7:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, September 02 2011 9:27 PM

Dan likes their relatively “easy” schedule, though. So we actually see eye-to-eye (7-9) when predicting this season’s failures and successes. We’re also both looking forward to a potential trip to the playoffs in 2012.

I suppose I’ll visit Dan sometime before the finale against Pittsburgh on New Year’s Day, just as I’ve done for the past two seasons. Last year, I even bought an ugly orange Browns t-shirt at Walmart to wear to the bar. (I gotta admit that it’s not cool — but, hey, Dan’s pals expect his dad to be square, anyway, don’t they?) I eagerly await the trip. To having another real bonding experience. To sharing a couple of the best burgers south of the Mason-Dixon line with my only son. And to crying in our beer together when the Browns lose.

Poor kid.