

This is one installment in a team effort by The Cleveland Fan, highlighting the top local sports figures by jersey number. Please weigh in with your thoughts on [the Boards](#) . And as David Letterman would say, "For entertainment purposes only; please, no wagering."



In our competition for best ever to wear #17 in Cleveland, Browns quarterback [Brian Sipe](#) was behind late in the game, but he rallied in the final few minutes to win it.

Well, that's not really how it came down. In fact, Sipe was a fairly easy choice at #17, blowing by the likes of Anderson Varejao, Travis Fryman, Tony Pena and Chris Gardocki like they were standing still. But coming from behind to win was Sipe's calling card, and it turned him from a draft afterthought into an NFL MVP and a local hero, when he became the face of the Kardiak Kids in 1979 and 1980 for the Browns.

Sipe's legacy in Cleveland is bittersweet, however. The author of so many thrilling come-from-behind victories was also the author of the ill-fated pass that brought down the curtain on the dream of 1980 for the Browns. That pass has come to be known to generations of Browns fans by the name of Sam Rutigliano's play call... "Red-Right-88", and it takes a backseat to no other gut-wrenching disappointment in the long tradition of gut-wrenching disappointments for this town's sports fans. But we'll get to that...

Surfing the North Coast

The Browns selected Brian Sipe in the 13th round of the 1972 draft, but the kid from San Diego State never thought he'd play pro football. He was a native of southern California...a surfer who looked the part, but it was boards of a different sort he figured to be using after his training camp tryout in Cleveland. Sipe had already made plans to move to Colorado to join some friends, and work as a waiter to support a skiing habit...(because that's what 22-year-olds did in the early 70's)



Instead he ended up on the Browns "taxi squad", an inactive player for his first two full NFL seasons, the guy on the sidelines with the clipboard and the ball cap. It's not as though his college career had been unimpressive. Sipe started for the Aztecs for three years (1969-71) and passed for 5,707 yards and 44 touchdowns. He was named Honorable Mention All-American by UPI in 1970 when he led SDSU to a 9-2 record while throwing for 2,618 yards and 23 TD's. The Aztecs spent eight weeks ranked in the Top 20 that year, and then as a senior, Sipe was recognized by both AP and UPI as Honorable Mention All-American.

Sipe learned passing offense from some of the greats of the era. His head coach at SDSU was a guy named [Coryell](#), a passing game guru now such a household word that a young fan might be excused for thinking his first name was "Air". Sipe's position coach was Rod Dowhower, who would also go on to a career as a coordinator and a head coach in the NFL.

He lasted until the 13th round because he was even shorter than his listed height of 6',1", and even lighter than his listed weight of 185 lbs. He didn't have a terribly strong arm either. *Plain Dealer*

writer Chuck Heaton predicted he'd never make it out of camp with the team. Somehow he stuck. The slopes of Colorado would have to wait.

Phipps Fades, Sipe Surfaces



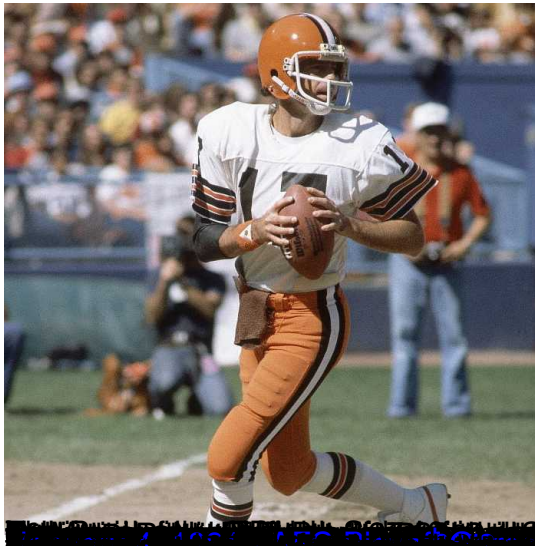
The Browns had winning marks in '72 and '73 with Mike Phipps at the helm, but things started to slide in the '74 season. Phipps got the team off to a 1-5 start, and Sipe came on in relief to help erase a 12-point deficit and beat the Broncos in late October. An omen. That earned Sipe four more starts, but the Browns managed just one win in those games, and he gave way once again to the first-rounder Phipps.

1974 ended 4-10, and 1975 started out on the same course, as Forrest Gregg replaced Nick Skorich as head coach. The Browns lost their first nine games, with Sipe getting a handful of starts alternating with Phipps. Both quarterbacks played in several of the games, as Gregg searched for some kind of winning formula. How desperate was he? A quarterback out of Texas A&M named [Will Cureton](#) started and played the whole game for the Browns against the Lions that year, the eighth loss in that streak of nine. Cureton never played a down of NFL football before or after that day. After that miserable '75 campaign, Modell brought in an acquaintance from the NFL office in New York to be his new general manager.

"My first week with the Browns (1976) I met with all the coaches and I said 'Is there anybody on this team who thinks Brian Sipe can take us to the Super Bowl?' No coach was opposed to us trying to move Brian if we could get anything for him." - Pete Hadhazy, Browns General Manager



[see 4.22 mark here](#)



[quarterbacks coach at San Diego State University](#)



[Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball), [Dustin Diamond](#) (2006 Baseball)

