

The Bengals' 25th Anniversary Season

A Team Was Born & A Legend Continued

by Jack Clary

January 7, 1963, the sports world is stunned.

Paul Brown, the greatest coach in the history of pro football, was fired by the Cleveland Browns, the team he had founded and led to seven league championships.

On that day, the Cincinnati Bengals were conceived.

No one in Cincinnati knew it ... probably Paul Brown himself didn't know it, but in reality, that is how things turned out.

There never was any doubt in PB's mind that he would return to pro football ... and there was always the burning desire to make that return in his native state of Ohio, where he had coached nearly all his life with such overwhelming success.

Pete Rozelle, commissioner of the NFL, was just as stunned as everyone else in pro football when he heard the news ... and like everyone else, he knew an injustice had been perpetrated. Brown had spearheaded the move that had helped him become commissioner less than three years earlier and Rozelle felt he owed him a great deal.

Thus it was a short time later that he assured PB that he would work to get him back into the NFL and that he would always be atop any recommendation list for teams seeking new coaches and/or general managers.

And it happened. The Philadelphia Eagles talked to him about becoming general manager but he was put off by their casual attitude and lack of commitment; he was scheduled to meet with Rankin Smith, owner of the new Atlanta Falcons franchise, in Chicago, but when he was kept waiting an hour and then told Smith had other plans that day, he left word he no longer was interested; and his friend, Dan Reeves, sought to hire him to coach the Los Angeles Rams but that team's internal ownership problems flashed the spectre of the troubles that had led to his demise in Cleveland, and he declined that offer, as well.

Pro football--and specifically the NFL--was undergoing drastic changes at that time. It was engaged in a pitched battle for the public's favor--and for playing talent--with the new American Football League, which had begun play in 1960. The birth of the AFL had speeded up the older league's expansion plans and it was trying to sew up lucrative sites. Dallas had been added in 1960, the Minnesota Vikings in 1961, and the NFL put teams in Atlanta and New Orleans, while the AFL settled for Miami.

In June, 1966, the two leagues agreed to merge under the umbrella of the NFL. The AFL at the time, had nine franchises, the NFL had 14 and both agreed that a 24 team league was more workable. Thus, the new team would be given to the AFL for two years, until the leagues were realigned under the new merger agreement.

As usual, Paul Brown was ahead of the curve, and he had his son, Mike, the team's current general manager, survey all potential sites in terms of economic viability and potential to support an NFL franchise.

Three cities emerged: Cincinnati, Phoenix and Seattle. But Cincinnati had an immediate appeal because there were 10 million people within a 100 mile radius and Ohio was a football savvy area, where Paul Brown still was king. Brown traveled to Seattle because it commanded an entire region of the country but the only playing site was the University of Washington's stadium and the school refused to allow it to be used for pro football. Arizona State likewise refused use of its stadium and there were no other suitable sites in either city.

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In the meantime, Bill Hackett, one of Brown's great players at Ohio State, and a dear friend, had visited his old coach in LaJolla, California, and learned about the survey and PB's still-rabid interest in returning to the NFL, especially in Ohio. Hackett was the chief veterinarian for Orleton Farms, in London, Ohio, owned by John Sawyer, and he not only got Sawyer enthused, but started campaigning with Governor James Rhodes to do what was necessary to get Cincinnati into the NFL.

Brown also had known Rhodes since his Ohio State coaching days and he assured the governor that he was most sincere about heading a franchise in Cincinnati--serious enough to be willing to invest a sizable amount of his own money to get the team started.

The NFL also had taken its surveys, run into the same roadblocks, and also determined that Cincinnati was the only solid site for a new franchise. Brown and Rozelle kept in touch on the issue and the commissioner assured PB that if he could put together a group that satisfied the NFL's ownership requirements, and come up with a suitable playing site, that he would use the considerable powers of his office to recommend to the AFL's expansion committee that Cincinnati should get a franchise in that league.

That was the easy part.

Where to play was the thorny one and that problem was running concurrently with Brown's attempts to secure an agreement with the NFL.

Crosley Field, home of the Reds, was not suitable for NFL football because of its outfield terrace, and its seating capacity fell far short of the NFL's then-mandated 50,000 minimum. Nippert Stadium at the University of Cincinnati held only 31,000 fans, also below the minimum but still okay for temporary use until a larger facility could be built.

So construction of a new stadium was a key factor in getting the franchise. The Bengals ownership group tried to persuade Bill DeWitt, the chief owner of the Reds, to join with them in construction of a new facility but since the Reds owned Crosley Field, he balked at the idea, citing heavy risks with a mid-city site.

Rhodes, Cincinnati mayor Gene Ruehlmann and Frank Dale, publisher of the Enquirer, began putting tremendous pressure on DeWitt, to become part of a new stadium plan. Dale, through his paper's news and editorial pages, finally exerted the most public influence because Bill soon found himself portrayed as the villain who could keep Cincinnati from getting its NFL franchise.

The final step came when many of the Bengals new owners formed their own group to purchase the Reds from DeWitt, thus solidifying the agreement to play in a new facility that today is Riverfront Stadium.

When the city was assured of two major league tenants, and when the NFL saw that its new team would have a facility that met its requirements, the existing barriers standing in the way of an agreement quickly tumbled down.

There also had been one other obstacle. At first, Brown was put off because his pitch to prospective team owners was that the team would not play in the NFL, but Rozelle assured him that the terms of the merger agreement, to be consummated in 1970, would result in competition against existing NFL teams.

"That was good enough for us," Brown later wrote, "and in May, 1967 we agreed to join the AFL, though the official announcement was not made until July and the final papers were not signed until September.

"Our group paid nearly \$9 million for the Cincinnati franchise but the price actually was closer to \$14 million because we received no television revenue until 1970. Our ownership was composed primarily of sportsmen...deliberately chosen to include men who not only represented some of Cincinnati's oldest families, but who did not view pro football as a quick-hit profit scheme and could also withstand the limited income for our first two seasons."

With a franchise in hand, came the need to pick a name.

PB later wrote:

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"I formed a committee of three, including myself, John Sawyer (chosen club president), and Dave Gamble, another of our owners, to make the selection. Both men had graduated from Princeton, the mascot of which was the tiger, so I said, 'Why not Tigers?' (Author's note: The mascot of PB's great Washington High School teams in Massillon also was the Tigers, and I'm sure this was not lost on him, either.)

"'Sounds all right with us,' they said, 'but it is kind of common, so why not make it Bengal Tigers or Bengals?'

"That was perfect because it was a name that could be animated and also one that picked up a thread of tradition that went back nearly 30 years to when the city had a professional football team named the Cincinnati Bengals."

The biggest expenditure for the new teams would be talent ... and that ultimate \$14 million investment did not net much value. The eight original AFL teams participated. Each was allowed to freeze 29 players, after which the Bengals could choose one. They froze two more, and then the Bengals got two more picks on the last round, each team froze one more player and the Bengals got another pick; and finally, each of the eight teams "gave" the Bengals a player.

"What they had decided to really give us was the bare minimum," Brown later wrote, "because they knew they faced a merger with the stronger NFL teams in just two seasons, and they did not want to sacrifice any of their quality players just to help the new guys.

"We were supposed to have been provided with vital statistics, including injuries, and all pertinent information about every player but they were often missing, and some names were even wrong. The lists included every cripple, bad actor, retiree or inept player in the AFL.

"More than a dozen of the 40 players we eventually picked never even showed up in training camp the following summer."

Brown had decided even before this allocation draft to build the Bengals from the regular NFL draft, "to raise our own," and 14 of the first 15 players selected that year--and 19 overall--made the team. The Bengals got a better deal here because they were allowed two first round picks, three in the second, third and fourth rounds, and two from the fifth through the 17th, with the exception of the sixth round when they had every AFL team's pick except Miami's.

Some of those selections included Bob Johnson, a center from Tennessee as its first choice; Paul Robinson, who won the AFL rushing title as a rookie in 1968 on the third round; Essex Johnson, for years the team's all-time rushing leader on the sixth round; and perhaps the most interesting, defensive back Jess Phillips from Michigan State, a fourth round choice who was in the slammer for passing bad checks. But the team checked him out thoroughly and was then convinced that he was more guilty of bad judgement than hardened criminal tendencies. He was released from jail six days before the team's first home game and made the starting lineup.

All in all, it probably wasn't the way Paul Brown envisioned his return to the NFL, but he often said it really didn't mater. He was happy to be back.

The Bengals and Brown stunned pro football by winning three games in their first season--they even had a 2-1 record after three games--and became the first team to make the playoffs within three seasons when the 1970 team won the AFC's Central Division. Brown's teams made two more playoff appearances, the last in 1975 in his final season as head coach.

He was succeeded by Bill Johnson who lasted until 1978 when an 0- 5 start, precipitated by Ken Anderson's broken hand in the final exhibition, doomed the team's chances. PB later admitted to friends that firing Johnson was more out of frustration than good sense and he later regretted such a precipitous move. He tried to make amends by rehiring Bill as an assistant coach in 1985.

After two consecutive losing seasons in 1978-79 under Homer Rice, Brown hired Forrest Gregg to bring some discipline to the team and it responded in 1981 by winning the AFC championship, but lost in Super Bowl XVI to the San Francisco 49ers, coached by former Bengals assistant Bill Walsh.

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Gregg's magic wore off in 1983 and he left to become head coach of the Green Bay Packers. So Brown hired another ex-Bengal, Sam Wyche, who had started three games at quarterback in its first season. Sam brought an innovative, imaginative and appealing offense to the pro game and made the Bengals one of the most powerful offensive teams in the NFL during the mid-80s. But he couldn't bring the team to a consistent performance until 1988 when it won its second AFC title, but again lost to Walsh and the 49ers in Super Bowl XXIII in the final 34 seconds.

Brown died in August, 1991 and as the Bengals end their first quarter century, his sons, Mike and Pete, and coach David Shula are directing the team's fortunes. In effect, PB's final act for the team was to hire Shula as an assistant coach in 1991.

But the orange and black--and the Tigers he loved so well--and the manner in which he impacted the city of Cincinnati will always be his personal legacy.

THE BENGALS THROUGH THE YEARS

YEAR	W-	L-	T	PCT.	FINISH	PTS-OPP	COACH
1968	3-11-	0	.214	5-West	215-329	Paul Brown	
1969	4- 9-	1	.308	5-W	280-367	Paul Brown	
1970	8- 6-	0	.571	1-Cent	312-255	Paul Brown	
Lost to Baltimore in Divisional Playoff							
1971	4-10-	0	.286	4-C	284-265	Paul Brown	
1972	8- 6-	0	.571	3-C	299-229	Paul Brown	
1973	10- 4-	0	.714	1-C	286-231	Paul Brown	
Lost to Miami in Divisional Playoff							
1974	7- 7-	0	.500	2(t)C	283-259	Paul Brown	
1975	11- 3-	0	.786	2-C	340-246	Paul Brown	
Lost to Oakland in Divisional Playoff							
1976	10- 4-	0	.714	2-C	335-210	Bill Johnson	
1977	8- 6-	0	.571	3-C	238-235	Bill Johnson	
1978	4-12-	0	.250	4-C	252-284	Bill Johnson, Homer Rice	
1979	4-12-	0	.250	4-C	337-421	Homer Rice	
1980	6-10-	0	.375	4-C	244-312	Forrest Gregg	
1981	12- 4-	0	.750	1-C	421-304	Forrest Gregg	
Defeated Buffalo in Divisional Playoff							
Defeated San Diego for AFC Championship							
Lost to San Francisco on Super Bowl XVI							
1982	7- 2-	0	.778	2(t)AFC	232-177	Forrest Gregg	
Lost to NY Jets in First Playoff Round							
1983	7- 9-	0	.438	3-C	346-302	Forrest Gregg	
1984	8- 8-	0	.500	2-C	339-339	Sam Wyche	
1985	7- 9-	0	.438	2(t)-C	441-437	Sam Wyche	
1986	10- 6-	0	.625	2-C	409-394	Sam Wyche	
1987	4-11-	0	.267	4-C	285-370	Sam Wyche	
1988	12- 4-	0	.750	1-C	449-329	Sam Wyche	
Defeated Seattle in Divisional Playoff							
Defeated Buffalo for AFC Championship							
Lost to San Francisco in Super Bowl XXIII							
1989	8- 8-	0	.500	4-C	404-285	Sam Wyche	
1990	9- 7-	0	.563	1-C	360-352	Sam Wyche	
Defeated Houston in First Round of Playoffs							
Lost to Raiders in Second Round of Playoffs							
1991	3-13-	0	.188	4-C	263-435	Sam Wyche	
1992	5-11-	0	.313	4-C	274-364	David Shula	

ALL-TIME BENGALS COACHING RECORDS

Paul Brown, 1968-75	55-59-1
Bill Johnson, 1976-78*	18-15-0
Homer Rice, 1978-79	8-19-0

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Forrest Gregg, 1980-83 34-27-0
Sam Wyche, 1984-91 69-79-0
David Shula, 1992 5-11-0
*-Resigned after five games

BENGALS RUSHING LEADERS

YEAR	Player	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
1968	Paul Robinson	*238	*1023	4.3	*8
1969	Jess Phillips	118	578	4.9	3
1970	Jess Phillips	163	648	4.0	4
1971	Fred Willis	135	590	4.4	7
1972	Essex Johnson	212	825	3.9	4
1973	Essex Johnson	195	997	5.1	4
1974	Charlie Davis	72	375	5.2	0
1975	Booby Clark	167	594	3.6	4
1976	Booby Clark	151	671	4.4	7
1977	Pete Johnson	153	585	3.8	4
1978	Pete Johnson	180	762	4.2	7
1979	Pete Johnson	243	865	3.6	14
1980	Pete Johnson	188	747	4.0	6
1981	Pete Johnson	274	1077	3.9	12
1982	Pete Johnson	156	622	4.0	7
1983	Pete Johnson	210	763	3.6	*14
1984	Larry Kinnebrew	154	623	4.0	9
1985	James Brooks	192	929	4.8	7
1986	James Brooks	205	1087	5.3	5
1987	Larry Kinnebrew	145	570	3.9	8
1988	Ickey Woods	203	1066	*5.3	*15
1989	James Brooks	221	1239	*5.6	7
1990	James Brooks	195	1004	5.1	5
1991	Harold Green	158	731	4.6	2
1992	Harold Green	265	1170	4.4	2

BENGALS PASSING LEADERS

YEAR	Player	ATT	COM	YDS	TD
1968	John Stofa	177	85	896	5
1969	*Greg Cook	197	106	1854	15
1970	Virgil Carter	278	143	1647	9
1971	Virgil Carter	222	138	1624	10
1972	Ken Anderson	301	171	1918	7
1973	*Ken Anderson	329	179	2428	18
1974	*Ken Anderson	328	*213	*2667	18
1975	*Ken Anderson	377	*228	*3169	21
1976	Ken Anderson	338	179	2367	19
1977	Ken Anderson	323	166	2145	11
1978	Ken Anderson	319	173	2219	10
1979	Ken Anderson	339	189	2340	16
1980	Ken Anderson	275	166	1778	6
1981	*Ken Anderson	479	300	3754	29
1982	*Ken Anderson	309	*218	2495	12
1983	Ken Anderson	297	198	2333	12
1984	Ken Anderson	275	175	2107	10
1985	Boomer Esiason	431	251	3443	27
1986	Boomer Esiason	469	273	3959	24
1987	Boomer Esiason	440	240	*3321	16
1988	*Boomer Esiason	388	223	3572	*28
1989	*Boomer Esiason	455	258	3525	*28
1990	Boomer Esiason	402	224	3031	24
1991	Boomer Esiason	413	233	2883	13
1992	Boomer Esiason	278	144	1407	11

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BENGALS RECEIVING LEADERS

YEAR	Player	NO	YDS	AVG	TD
1968	Bob Trumpy	37	639	17.3	3
1969	Eric Crabtree	40	855	21.4	7
1970	Chip Myers	32	542	16.9	1
1971	Bob Trumpy	40	531	13.3	3
1972	Chip Myers	57	792	13.9	3
1973	Isaac Curtis	45	*843	*18.7	9
1974	Chip Myers	32	383	12.0	1
1975	Isaac Curtis	44	934	*21.2	7
1976	Isaac Curtis	41	766	18.7	6
1977	Billy Brooks	39	772	19.8	4
1978	Isaac Curtis	47	737	15.7	3
1979	Don Bass	58	724	12.5	3
1980	Dan Ross	56	724	12.9	4
1981	Dan Ross	71	910	12.8	5
1982	Cris Collinsworth	49	700	14.3	1
1983	Cris Collinsworth	66	1130	17.1	5
1984	Cris Collinsworth	64	989	15.5	6
1985	Cris Collinsworth	65	1125	17.3	5
1986	Cris Collinsworth	62	1024	16.5	10
1987	Eddie Brown	44	608	13.8	3
1988	Eddie Brown	53	*1273	*24.0	9
1989	Tim McGee	65	1211	18.6	8
1990	Eddie Brown	44	706	16.0	*9
1991	Eddie Brown	59	827	14.0	2
1992	Harold Green	41	214	5.2	0

BENGALS KICKING LEADERS

YEAR	PLAYER	TD	XP	FG	PTS
1968	Dale Livingston	0	20	13	59
1969	Horst Muhlmann	0	32	16	80
1970	Horst Muhlmann	0	33	25	108
1971	Horst Muhlmann	0	31	20	91
1972	Horst Muhlmann	0	30	27	111
1973	Horst Muhlmann	0	31	21	94
1974	Horst Muhlmann	0	32	33	65
1975	Dave Green	0	40	10	70
1976	Chris Bahr	0	39	14	81
1977	Chris Bahr	0	25	19	82
1978	Chris Bahr	0	26	16	74
1979	Chris Bahr	0	40	13	79
1980	Ian Sunter	0	15	11	48
1981	Jim Breech	0	49	22	*115
1982	Jim Breech	0	25	14	67
1983	Jim Breech	0	39	16	87
1984	Jim Breech	0	37	22	103
1985	Jim Breech	0	48	24	120
1986	Jim Breech	0	50	17	101
1987	Jim Breech	0	25	*24	*97
1988	Jim Breech	0	*56	11	89
1989	Jim Breech	0	37	12	73
1990	Jim Breech	0	41	17	92
1991	Jim Breech	0	27	23	96
1992	Jim Breech	0	31	19	88

* - Led AFL/AFC

BENGALS ALL-CONFERENCE/ALL-LEAGUE

Players chosen to at least one major All-Pro or All-Conference Team; Consensus choices in caps

1968: PAUL ROBINSON, RB

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1969: BOB TRUMPY, TE
1970: Bob Trumpy, TE; Jess Phillips, RB; David Lewis, P
1971: Mike Reid, DT
1972: Bob Johnson, C; MIKE REID, DT; Lemar Parrish, CB
1973: Bob Johnson, C; MIKE REID, DT
1974: Isaac Curtis, WR; Ken Anderson, Q; Mike Reid, DT; Lemar Parrish, CB
1975: Isaac Curtis, WR; Ken Anderson, Q; Ken Riley, CB; Tom Casanova, S
1976: Isaac Curtis, WR; Coy Bacon, DE; Ken Riley, CB; Lemar Parrish, CB; Tom Casanova, S
1977: Tom Casanova, S; Chris Bahr, K
1978: none
1979: none
1980: none
1981: ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT; KEN ANDERSON, Q; PAT McINALLY, K
1982: ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT; Louis Breedon, CB
1983: Cris Collinsworth, WR; ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT; KEN RILEY, CB
1984: Anthony Munoz, OT
1985: ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT
1986: ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT; Max Montoya, OG; James Brooks, RB; Tim McGee, KR
1987: ANTHONY MUNOZ
1988: Eddie Brown, WR; ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT; Max Montoya, OG; BOOMER ESIASON, QB; TIM
KRUMRIE,
NT; David Fulcher, S
1989: Rodney Holman, TE; ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT; Boomer Esiason, QB; James Brooks, RB; DAVID
FULCHER,
S
1990: ANTHONY MUNOZ, OT; David Fulcher, S
1991: Anthony Munoz, OT
1992: none