

What's in a Name?

By Steven M Brainerd

The NFL now has five teams named after minor league football teams that previously played in the same city. Of late, the National Football League has not shown a great deal of creativity in selecting nicknames for its franchises.

In 1960 a new league started up to compete with the establishment and among the new teams were the Buffalo Bills. The Bills were supposedly named in honor of All-American Conference team of the same name from the 1940's.

However, and I am sure that new Bills were totally unaware of them, another football team in Buffalo had been using that name for the last seven years. The Western New York Semi-Pro Conference had been operating since 1946 always with a team or two in Buffalo. In 1953 the current Buffalo team in the WNYSPFC changed its name from the Dekdebruns to the Bills and continue under that moniker for eight very successful seasons and rolled up a 70-14 record and win 5 championships. They even played their home games at War Memorial Stadium.

In 1963 the Cleveland Browns fired the greatest pro football coach because Paul Brown hadn't won a championship for Art Modell. In 1968 Brown got back into pro football with an expansion team, the Cincinnati Bengals.

In selecting that name, the Browns honored Cincinnati's most successful pro football club; the original Cincinnati Bengals, who had also played in the AFL from 1937 through 1941. The Bengals were not a particularly good team finishing a five year run with 18 wins, 23 losses and 8 ties and no championships. The new Bengals and the original Bengals even used the same black and orange color scheme.

The 1976 season saw the addition of two new teams to the NFL. Seattle, which is of no interest here, and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers who are. Once again the ownership showed real creativity in selecting a nickname for the new club.

In 1960 the Tampa Buccaneers of the Florida Football League issued an invitation to the Massillon Tigertown Stars of the American Conference to come south and play in the Cigar Bowl. Don't know if the game was played or much else about the Bucs, except that they were members of the FFL, which started play in 1948.

After nearly two decades, the NFL decided to expand again and make some more money from the fees for the quality players. Again two teams were added and again only one is of interest here.

The Jacksonville Jaguars first played in 1966 as a member of North American League. The NAFL finished its second season with only three teams standing; the two who played for the championship and the 4-8 Jaguars. The Jaguars had been playing since 1962; this was their third league and third nickname. As the Bears, they won the 1962 Florida Football League title. Moving to the Southern League, they became the Robins, and continued to win, capturing the 1963 league gonfalon and finishing 8-5-1 the following season. Moving into the NAFL and changing names yet again, the Jaguars played poorly, finished strongly and were reborn again in 1995. It's doubtful the new owners had even ever heard of the old Jaguars.

1999 finally saw the NFL fulfill Pete Rozelle's fantasy of a 32-team league with the addition of-ta-dah! -- the Houston Texans. It was really nice of Bob McNair to honor the 1981 Dixie Football League champion by naming his \$700,000,000 NFL franchise after them. The DFL expanded further into Texas by adding two new teams including the Lone Star Texans of Houston. Finishing second in the western division at 6-

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1-1, the Texans had to start their playoff run by beating their Houston city rivals, the Drillers, 17-6 on the road.

The following week was a second road trip to Pensacola to play the 8-1-1 Wings. Again being the visitor paid with a very surprising 16-14 victory. This put them into the DFL title contest versus the 8-time defending champion New Orleans Blue Knights. As the Blue Knights couldn't draw more than a couple of dozen mosquitoes at home, the Texans got to play at their home crib and took advantage of the situation beating the Blue Knights 21 to 6.

Certainly nice of the NFL to remember Houston's last pro football championship.