

OPINION:

Please Stop Ravaging NFL Uniforms!

By Roger Gordon

I admit, it's fun to have favorite players to root for. However, in today's NFL - and other pro sports, for that matter - few players spend their entire careers with one team like the old days. So rather than try to root for all your favorite players in 10 different cities, it's easier to root for your favorite team - no matter who is playing for it. In other words, in today's game, you need to root for the uniform first and foremost because before you know it, your favorite player will likely be playing for another team. And it's much more fun to root for your favorite team when it "looks good," wears eye-pleasing attire. Uniforms and helmets (or, in the words of The NFL History Network's administrator Frank Mann, "cranium caps") are a key factor in tracing the history and tradition of the NFL. Take the St. Louis-New England Super Bowl last season for example. Had the Rams and Patriots played shirts and skins that evening, would it have been the same? Not! And what many teams are doing when it comes to their attire is the same thing that is occurring in other pro sports leagues - they are trying to fix what ain't broken. And it is quite irritating. Teams are taking perfectly nice-looking uniforms, and they are ruining them.

The Dolphins in aqua pants that they've worn periodically since 1990? Gimme a break! The Broncos' XFL look that was born in 1997? Ughhh! The Buccaneers' horrifying pants of what color they are I still can't figure? Please! The Saints in their stripe-less black pants that make the players resemble spandex-clad ballet dancers? At times, I feel like I'm watching The Nutcracker, for God's sake!

I realize times change, and change is a part of life - in all aspects of society. However, adhering to history and tradition must come into play at times. And when it comes to NFL team uniforms, there has to be a limit when it comes progressing with the times by altering the look of a team. I mean, how would the Boston Celtics look in red and purple? Or how would the New York Yankees look in green and powder blue? I'll tell you who they WOULDN'T look like - the Celtics and the Yankees, that's for sure. And to me, the Broncos don't look like the Broncos anymore. They look like impostors to me.

With the Buccaneers' recent success, it doesn't seem like it's the Buccaneers out there. If they had their original helmets and uniforms, I'd be more apt to think to myself, "Wow! The pitiful Tampa Bay Buccaneers are finally enjoying some success. That's pretty cool. I'm happy for them." But wearing what they are wearing - doing their best to become a reincarnation of

the Oakland Raiders in a different shade - makes it seem like it's an entirely different team out there, not the Bad News Bucs. I guess it would be different if these uniform changes were to the positive, but those are far and few between (see the Philadelphia Eagles entry below). I would think there are marketing "experts" hired by these teams who make these decisions. Apparently, these "experts" have no clue about what looks good and what doesn't, about the tradition and history of the NFL. It's hard for me to believe there is actually a person who specializes in marketing concepts who thought it was a good idea for the Patriots to completely revamp their uniform in 1993 from one of the most classic uniforms in history to the garbage they wear today. Or for one of these so-called "experts" to actually believe that changing the Buffalo Bills' helmet to red in 1984 was a good idea in that Buffalo's helmet went from being one of the more flattering in the league to resembling a billboard.

The following is one person's breakdown of each of the 32 present NFL teams' uniforms and how they have or have not changed in the positive or negative during the last generation or two:

***Buffalo Bills**

Helmet - Once one of the nicest with the plain white background, ravaged in 1984 with the change to a red background.

Uniform - Ruined this past season with a change to what looks like a circus act.

***Miami Dolphins**

Helmet - Has always been one of the best in the league, with minute changes in recent years only to fans whose eyes are like magnifying glasses.

Uniform - As long as the aqua pants are thrown away for good, one of the finer looking in the league. The 3-D or drop-shadow effect on the numbers needs to be scratched, too, for a return to the plainer look of the old days.

***New England Patriots**

Helmet - One of the classic in history until it was ravaged in 1993.

Uniform - Ditto.

***New York Jets**

Helmet - One of the best looking in the history of the league. The green one from 1978-97 wasn't bad, but this retro one is much improved. However, it would look a lot better if the Jets played where they should be playing - Shea Stadium.

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Uniform - Sweet looking with the all-white. Okay with the green jerseys. Scratch the stripes on the shoulders. The one from 1978-97 was not bad, especially with the all white, as well. Again, just like with the helmet, the Jets' uniform would improve drastically with a return to Shea.

*Baltimore Ravens

Helmet - Bring back the shield! Get rid of that hideous-looking bird!

Uniform - Not bad. I just wish they'd get rid of that Roman look, or whatever it is, with the numbers.

*Cincinnati Bengals

Helmet - Not bad, but a return to the original one would be a definite positive.

Uniform - The Bengals may not lead the NFL in wins, but they do lead the league in something else - my applause. The applause are for the fact they are the only one of the present 32 NFL teams who have never worn colored pants, and that is a very good thing. Few teams look good in colored pants, and the Bengals would look plain awful. The Bengals in their all whites is one of the best looks in the league. Now that they play in a natural turf stadium, even the dark shirts look better now.

*Cleveland Browns

Helmet - Quite "simply," one of the top helmets in the NFL. The fact they are logo-less is the Browns' trademark.

Uniform - Other than nine seasons with orange pants and a few tweaks here and there, have pretty much stayed the course. One suggestion: The stripes on the pants need to be thinner like the old days. The thick stripes look too amateurish.

*Pittsburgh Steelers

Helmet - Nice looking, and the logo on one side is their trademark.

Uniform - I would prefer a return to white pants, but I realize that will never happen. But as long as the gold pants stay around, I think the Steelers look much better in their white jerseys. The black jerseys with the gold pants is too busy. I realize many fans will disagree with that, but again, in my opinion, the plainer, the better.

*Houston Texans

Helmet - Surprisingly sweet. Very unusual for me to favor anything brand new in this day and age. But it's simple, and that's what I like.

Uniform - Remarkably, the colored pants actually look good. I'd like to see white pants, though, because that would look even better.

*Indianapolis Colts

Helmet - This helmet might be a little too plain. However, a return to Baltimore and an outdoor venue with natural turf, and this helmet ranks up there near the top.

Uniform - Other than a stab at blue pants for a short time, have never changed. The plainness is just plain good for hanging onto some shred of tradition. One suggestion that has nothing to do with the look of the team: Change the name to "Indiana Colts." That sounds much better. To put this in perspective, imagine if the Minnesota Vikings were called the "Minneapolis Vikings."

*Jacksonville Jaguars

Helmet - Not bad, not great. I'd say above average, though.

Uniform - Ditto except when they don the ugly black pants. Also, something's wrong with the shade of green (or whatever it is) on the jerseys. I can't explain what it is, but it's just not right.

*Tennessee Titans

Helmet - The most unattractive in the league by far.
Uniform - Ditto to the second degree.

*Denver Broncos

Helmet - I used to think it was one of the ugliest in the league, but now that I see what they wear now, it makes me yearn for the old one.

Uniform - Ditto.

*Kansas City Chiefs

Helmet - One of the tops in the NFL. One of the few that looks good minus the stripes. The arrowhead is not too big unlike the Bills' logo that covers entirely too much space.

Uniform - So nice looking that the Chiefs are one of very few teams that might actually look better in their colored pants.

*Oakland Raiders

Helmet - Quite simply, the No. 1 helmet in the NFL. It's not too busy and just oozes with evilness.

Uniform - One of the few that looks good with colored pants. To be honest, I can't imagine the Raiders in white pants. A la the Steelers, the Raiders look better in their white jerseys, which I realize many will disagree with. But the Oakland Raiders in their white jerseys to me is the best-looking NFL uniform combination ever (very much like the Ohio State Buckeyes' in the college ranks).

*San Diego Chargers

Helmet - One of the nicer in the league. Big improvement from the powder blue ones from the 1960s.

Uniform - As long as the Chargers stay away from colored - blue or yellow - pants, one of the finer looking in the league.

*Dallas Cowboys

Helmet - How can anyone dislike this? It is All-American and simply pleasing to the eyes.

Uniform - Although rarely worn, the blue jerseys are much more attractive than the white ones, which is

opposite of my opinions on the Steelers and Raiders. When Dallas dons the white jerseys, the team looks a little too prim and proper. I think the reason for this is the helmet and pants looks so prim and proper that a white jersey overdoes the clean look.

*New York Giants

Helmet - The retro look of the "ny" is a huge improvement over the hideous University of Illinois-looking "GIANTS" look the team had for years.
Uniform - Kind of blah, but the more I see them, the more I like them. They radiate a feeling of the good 'ole days when the team played its home games in Yankee Stadium.

*Philadelphia Eagles

Helmet - Dramatic improvement in recent times with the darker shade of green and the stripe around the logo.
Uniform - Ditto on the major improvement due to the darker shade of green, and the tweaks in the design. I never thought it was possible for the Eagles' look to be pleasing to the eyes, but they proved me wrong.

*Washington Redskins

Helmet - Never liked the Redskin logo. Way too busy and covers too much space. I like the "new" retro look they wore for half their games this past season. Go back to that full time.
Uniform - They need to wear white pants all the time.

*Chicago Bears

Helmet - I've always liked this. The fact that it's gone unchanged for years is a definite positive.
Uniform - Hasn't changed much throughout the years, and has that "old days" flavor. Also one of the few teams that looks decent in colored pants.

*Detroit Lions

Helmet - Never were that attractive to me - that is, until I saw highlights of when the Lions played in Tiger Stadium. An outdoor venue with natural turf improves this by leaps and bounds.
Uniform - Ditto.

*Green Bay Packers

Helmet - It may not be one of the top ones, but it definitely isn't one of the worst, and the most important thing is ... it's filled with tradition. This is one helmet that will NEVER, EVER be tinkered with, let alone changed.
Uniform - Ditto (although I'd love to see white pants, but to tell you the truth, I can't imagine the Packers in anything but the yellow).

*Minnesota Vikings

Helmet - Another prime example of a nice-looking helmet being ruined by the venue the team plays in. When the Vikes played in Metropolitan Stadium, this helmet was in the upper echelon of the league.
Uniform - Ditto. Thank God they don't wear the putrid

purple pants they tried years ago.

*Atlanta Falcons

Helmet - Never cared for them - red or black.
Uniform - Ditto (and Jerry Glanville changing the predominant color from red to black to look meaner just didn't work).

*Carolina Panthers

Helmet - Powder blue just doesn't do it for me.
Uniform - Ditto.

*New Orleans Saints

Helmet - One of the finest looking in the NFL. Unique in that no other team has their colors. The anchor logo is absolutely splendid.
Uniform - As long as the silly-looking stripe-less black pants are not worn, the Saints look great whether they wear black, white or gold pants.

*Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Helmet - The original may reek of losing, but it still is the original, and that's why it needs to be brought back. Plus, it's much nicer looking than the present one.
Uniform - Ditto except do away with the old orange pants and stick with the white.

*Arizona Cardinals

Helmet - As far as I know, it has never changed since the Cardinal was put on it. That's a very good thing. And it's nice looking, too.
Uniform - Do away with the red pants. The white pants improve the look of the helmet drastically.

*St. Louis Rams

Helmet - I realize the Rams organization wanted to tweak it a bit with the relocation from Los Angeles to St. Louis to form its own identity in the midwest. However, the changes they made, though not drastic, were enough of a difference to weaken it a great deal. They darkened the colors and changed the design somewhat, and at the same time, botched one of the finest-looking helmets in the NFL.
Uniform - Ditto.

*San Francisco 49ers

Helmet - Always one of the best-looking ones.
Uniform - Ditto. But the retro white pants they donned in '94 might make them look even better.

*Seattle Seahawks

Helmet - The new colors just don't jive.
Uniform - This is just another example of a team trying to fix what ain't broken, taking a fine-looking uniform and flat out ruining it just so teenagers would buy the team products (I guess there are some pretty tasteless teens in the northwest).

*Note - Under no circumstance do I favor any team wearing colored pants with colored jerseys. It's just plain unattractive and high schoolish-looking.