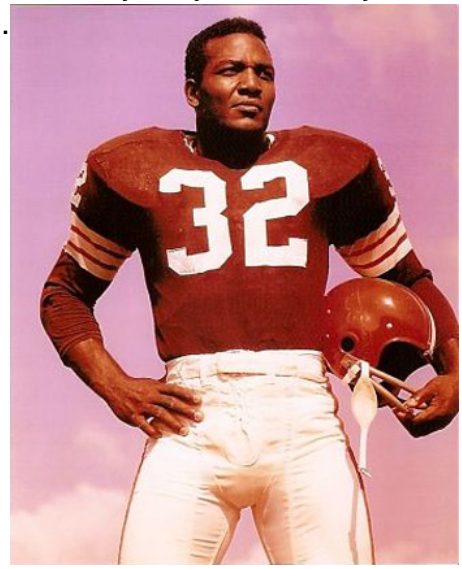
Just months after achieving iconic status on the cover of Madden NFL 12, a celebrated part of Cleveland Browns history appears to have reached a sad and rather sudden conclusion. I'm talking, of course, about the team's traditional brown jerseys—which remain completely and conspicuously unworn halfway through the 2011 season.

Admittedly, this is the kind of column one is forced to write when the actual football-related details of a football team drift into total and utter irrelevance (I didn't even watch Sunday's game—maybe the first one I've missed in four or five years). But that doesn't mean we should take this jersey issue lightly. For fans who've consistently raised hell about "saving Chief Wahoo" or—perhaps more relevantly—"getting rid of those horrible brown pants," on-field aesthetics are clearly more than a passing concern. So, it's a bit surprising that no one seems particularly up-in-arms yet about the Cleveland Browns' increasingly disturbing rejection of their once eponymous attire. Yes, the pants have mercifully returned to their original white, and yes, we got the memo about the team wearing all white at home games like the olden days. But we never said shit about wanting the brown jerseys jettisoned entirely. Just what the hell is going on here?

Down with the Brown

Once virtually synonymous with autumn fashions in the Forest City, the Browns' seal-shaded tops have routinely outsold their understated white counterparts at retail shops for decades. But this popular approval also came with a unique caveat of sorts. To put it bluntly, not everyone

likes the look of a laddie decked out in neck-to-nuts brown-- as evidenced by the complete avoidance of this color in the logos and uniforms of every other team in the National Football League. Maybe the Browns would have sidestepped the brun themselves had they not been considerably handcuffed by a visually limited team name. But, as the story goes on the campus of Bowling Green State University, coach Paul Brown legitimately liked the look of the Falcons' autumnal brown/orange unis when his fledging Brownies practiced at BGSU in 1946. So, he swiped that color scheme for his own club—clearing the way for the eventual introduction of the chocolate colored jersey in 1957… just in time for the greatest player in league history to wear it with pride.



Across 50 odd seasons, the outside world hasn't always lavished those brown shirts with love. And whether you've donned a Mitchell & Ness #32 throwback, a #19 Logo-7 Bernie jersey, or one of those glossy, Goodwill-bound Hillis numbers, the odds are good that you've been likened to a walking crap stain by at least one enemy combatant in your lifetime.

For defensive purposes, we could certainly concentrate on the millions of things in life that are brown BESIDES fecal matter (dirt comes to mind, for example, as well as certain crayons). But the point is that Cleveland fans never particularly cared about the aesthetic criticisms lobbed at them by the boring gold, purple, and silver-wearers of other cities. We were confident that our charming pumpkin-looking helmets and poo-colored shirts formed a tandem unrivaled in sports—unsupported by a logo, yet unmistakable up against any other uniform in the land.

Brown Jersey Pride

So, that was the origin of “brown jersey pride” as we came to know it-- although no one has actually called it that or even really discussed it at any length. Fact is, Browns fans are well aware that the old school all-white look is a tad more classy, and when the current Browns front office announced plans to go with the white jersey and white pants at all home games in 2011, they did so by stating it was in line with the wishes of the fans. I’m not sure when that vote was officially held, but let’s go ahead and assume that sentiment is true. Does it also mean that Cleveland fans understood the white jerseys would remain the norm on the road, as well? Did we all unwittingly agree to completely retire the color brown from the uniform of the Cleveland BROWNS?

Maybe it’s all just a case of fluke circumstances through the first eight weeks. Maybe the brown jerseys are safe and sound, ready to be called upon whenever the next Cleveland opponent feels like wearing white. Or then again, maybe we’re seeing the beginning of a jersey’s slow and painful extinction. It’s hardly unprecedented. Remember the ill-advised orange jerseys of the late Tim Couch era? They were quietly buried under the rubble of the Butch Davis regime. And what about brown jerseys in general? The AFL’s Denver Broncos had them before switching to a much safer blue and orange template in the NFL. In baseball, the San Diego Padres were all about the brown until the ‘90s, when they also cut all ties with their roots and went blue. The St. Louis Browns (whose logo didn't help by actually looking literaly like shit) went as far as to cease existing in the 1950s. And even the Bowling Green Falcons—innovators of the brown football jersey—have gone almost entirely orange in the past couple decades.

In closing, it would be a damn shame if your copy of Madden 12 became a sad reminder of fleeting, wasted glory. Okay, so maybe it’s doomed to be that anyway. But can we at least give Chris Ogbannaya the true Browns experience as long as we’re stuck with him? Can we put a

Cleveland Brown in a brown jersey?