The hay was in the barn. Done deal.

That's what we all went to bed on Friday believing, or at least we were instructed to believe that was the truth. By Sunday night, the whole thing had gone up in smoke. On Thursday, Browns fans watched the Oregon Ducks, rooted for their savior-to-be Chip Kelly best the #5 Kansas State Wildcats 35-17 in the Fiesta Bowl. Chip went back to the team hotel, got what we hope was a good night's sleep, and started talking to Jimmy Haslam III and Joe Banner on Friday afternoon in Scottsdale.

Aside from firing Pat Shurmur earlier in the week, this was pretty much the first act that the new braintrust had on their agenda, despite the Mr. Haslam receiving the keys to the kingdom back in October. This was about hiring the head coach, but really it was finding someone to drive the darn bus after Mike Holmgren was told to abandon ship as the Team President in November. Rumor had it that they were looking for someone to be the everything guy as the Head Coach, then find a more hands-off General Manager that would fit everyone's vision, after the fact. Of course, all of that was built on the inevitable hiring of Chip Kelly.

Regardless of what claims you'll hear out of the new bosses in Berea, the interview was about Chip Kelly listening to a lucrative NFL offer, but it was all about Kelly interviewing the Browns, to see if the job was good enough for him to leave his cushy gig in Eugene, Oregon. The reputation for college coaches making the jump to the NFL ranks is sketchy, at best. Really, Jimmy Johnson is the only relevant name to win at both levels, but Kelly does not possess an actual title, despite his undeniable success with the Ducks. At first glance, Browns fans remember the Butch Davis experiment, then cite Bobby Petrino and Nick Saban as examples what could go wrong with this notion.

From where I sit, I like to point out Jim Harbaugh, Pete Carroll, and Greg Schiano. The jury is still out on Schiano, but in the combined five years that Harbaugh and Carroll have been with their current teams, they have four playoff appearances between the two of them. Kelly is an innovator, but unlike the NFC West kings of the headset, Chip Kelly has never worked with the NFL in any capacity, and that scares people. That alone makes him a risk, sure. However, what's easy to lose sight of is how long Harbaugh and Carroll had been in the college game, and how much the NFL has changed in that time. In my eyes, that made the former University of New Hampshire Offensive Coordinator worth a roll of the dice. Frankly, it isn't like things could get all that much worse for the Cleveland Browns.

BREAKING: Chip Kelly is close to a deal to become the #Browns coach, according to a source informed of his situation.

— Ian Rapoport (@RapSheet) January 4, 2013

Unlike the Chiefs, who interviewed Andy Reid last week and hired him before he could leave town, the Browns let Kelly out of their sight. He met with Philadelphia on Saturday, and ultimately made the decision on Sunday night to return to Eugene. The Bills were set to interview Kelly as well, but hired Doug Marrone, the Head Coach of Syracuse that was widely believed to be Plan B for the Browns.

In the early AM hours on Monday, the Browns and Eagles are without a coach. Word is that the Browns are interested in Montreal Alouettes Head Coach Marc Trestman, who has NFL experience, but will also interview with Chicago. What remains to be seen, through no fault of their own, is how Haslam and Banner rebound from this PR mess that's been created. Cleveland fans, admittedly quick to overreact, have drawn comparisons between Kelly's choice to decline any offer (if one was made) and LeBron James televised decision to shun Cleveland for the Miami Heat in 2010.

Bottom line: No Chip Kelly for the Browns this time around. It appears that the Browns put their eggs in one basket, but that basket didn't have the heart to leave the University of Oregon.

Stay tuned...