This is one installment in a team effort by The Cleveland Fan, highlighting the top local sports figures by jersey number. Please weigh in with your thoughts on the "Boards". As David Letterman would say, "For entertainment purposes only; please, no wagering"

“In life, as in football, you won’t go far unless you know where the goal posts are.” – Arnold H. Glasgow

Since the return of the Browns, there has been only one constant. For a franchise that has gone through quarterback after quarterback and coach after coach at an alarming rate, it’s the kicker that has been the lone salvation for a beaten down fan base. Arguably the most underappreciated, underrated field goal maker in the NFL, Philip Drury Dawson has persevered through years of losing and two off-the-field family issues that would bring any man to his knees to become one of the most celebrated and revered athletes in Cleveland sports history. TheClevelandFan.com’s list of the Top Cleveland Sports Figures by Number continues with #4, Phil Dawson.

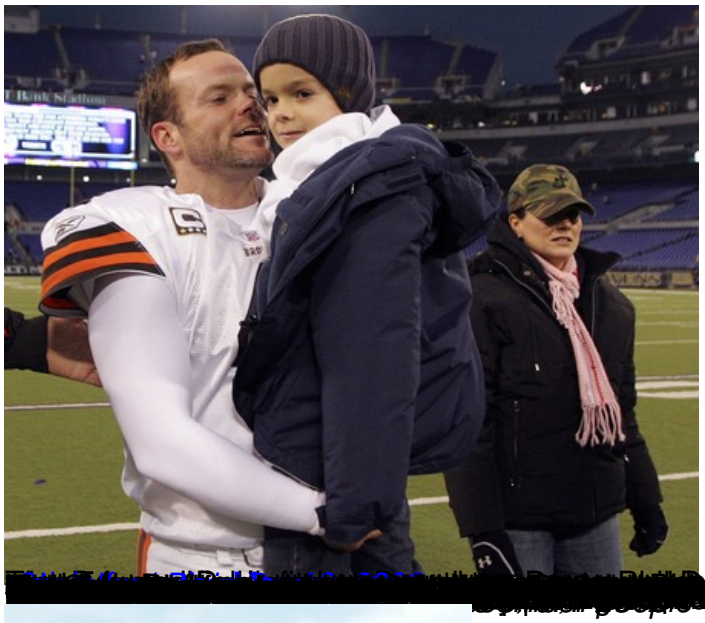
Dawson's path to the NFL didn't go the way you would imagine it to go for a kicker who graduated from the University of Texas. A byproduct of Lake Highlands High School, the alma mater of former Browns kicker Matt Stover, Dawson was an All-American with a penchant for nailing big kicks. In 1995, as a sophomore, Dawson received hero status in Austin for his game -winning 50-yard field goal in 30 miles per hour winds to beat Virginia, 17-16, to kick start a six-game winning streak and help propel the Longhorns to the Sugar Bowl.

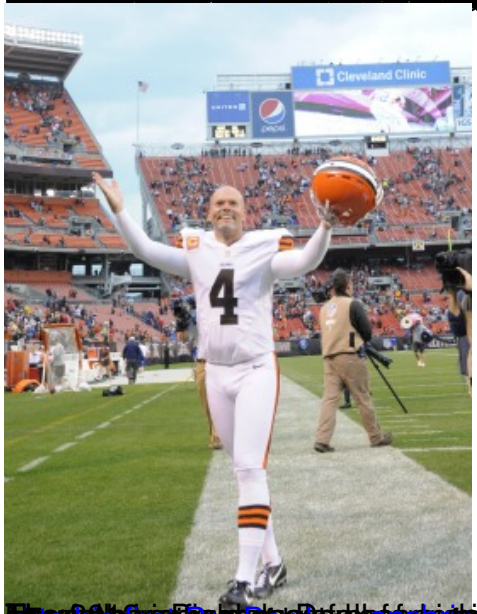
Despite a terrific college career, Dawson went undrafted. The Oakland Raiders signed him, but cut him shortly after. The New England Patriots added him to their practice squad, but he never got in a game. The Cleveland Browns, in need of a kicker as an expansion franchise, signed Dawson in March of 1999. The rest, as they say, is history.

Since the return of the Browns in 1999, the franchise has scored 3,677 points. Of those points, 1,265 of them have come from the right foot of Dawson, who is one of 25 kickers to have 300 or more made field goals in their career. Of that list, Dawson is one of three kickers to have made all of those field goals for one team. Dawson also has one touchdown to his name, a 1999 fake field goal touchdown run.

Kicking in Cleveland is no picnic. Down on the lakefront, with sometimes brutal conditions and windy Sundays at Cleveland Browns Stadium, Dawson has been called on to make the nearly impossible seem almost too easy. One shining example occurred on December 16, 2007 when Dawson nailed a 49-yard line drive on a snow-covered field in blizzard-like conditions to help beat the Buffalo Bills, 8-0. Time after time, Dawson, whose career field goal percentage in Cleveland is 84.9 percent, has hit a crucial kick at a critical time or has been the only offense the Browns have mustered.

Dawson is probably best remembered for his November 18, 2007 game-tying kick in Baltimore. The 51-yarder, which hit the left upright and then the cross bar support after going through the uprights, was correctly reversed upon "official review". Dawson would then hit a 33-yarder in overtime to move the Browns to 6-4 and keep their playoff hopes alive.

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