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, in the Boards. As David Letterman would say, "For entertainment purposes only; please, no wagering."

"Hey Greg, were Hanford Dixon and Frank Minnifield really as good as everyone says?"

My inquisitor was an NFL fan- but of a non-Cleveland stripe, and of a younger generation. This was an important question, and it required the emphasis of understatement. I nodded.

"Oh, yeah."

I mentioned "Night Train" Lane and Dick LeBeau of the early 1960s Detroit Lions. Deion Sanders and Larry Brown of the 1995 Dallas Cowboys. Sam Madison and Patrick Surtain of the early 2000s Miami Dolphins.

"You could make a case for Lester Hayes and Michael Haynes of the 1980s Oakland Raiders. They probably are the best tandem in NFL history- at least, they won a Super Bowl. Of course, many maintain that the Prevent Defense Marty Schottenheimer employed against Denver was the reason the Browns didn't reach the Super Bowl in the '80s. Nobody blames Top Dawg and

Mighty Minnie.

So yeah, Dixon and Minnifield were among the best corners in NFL history."

Later that day, I flipped my friend this link.

And this one, too .

I suspect this "Top Figures" series will have plenty to say about the iconic duo. Dixon, the first round draft pick with the oversized hand towel swaying from his

belt, and Minnifield, the fearless USFL refugee who was short in stature but not in strength of will.

In his *Day of the Dawg* book, Hanford Dixon discusses this at length. He also notes the immediate impact of another defensive back acquired for that 1984 season, the one that saw the Browns' debut of Minnifield.

Number 20.

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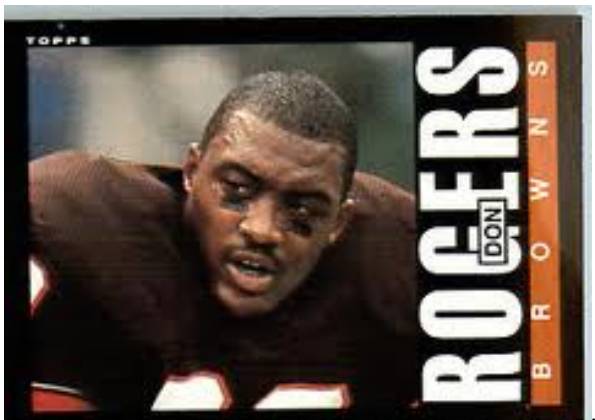
The player side of Don Rogers was aggression personified. He began leading the UCLA Bruins defense from his safety position as a sophomore. By the time he graduated, he was a unanimous All-American, a can't-miss star in the pros. Browns coach Sam Rutigliano was sold: Rogers was the one he wanted to select with their first pick in the NFL draft.

The United States Football League was still in operation, however, and the San Antonio Gunslingers drafted him as well. They traded his signing rights to the Arizona Wranglers. Dixon reveals that Browns coach and former running back Calvin Hill (basketball star Grant Hill's father) wined and dined Rogers, convincing him to sign with Cleveland.

Rogers had an immediate impact with the Browns. He warmed up to the barking of the other DBs and the Dawg Pound. It was almost like having two players in his #20 jersey. From his safety position, he provided strong pass coverage, but he also plugged running lanes at the line of scrimmage. He hit like a linebacker, too. To the rest of the National Football League, having to face Dixon, Minnifield, and Don Rogers was just scary.

The Browns had high expectations in 1984, but suffered a down season. The offense struggled with Paul McDonald at quarterback. Rutigliano, once celebrated locally for his gambling mindset on offense, had several decisions backfire. The team was also beset by injuries. He was fired by Art Modell after a 1-7 start. Marty Schottenheimer, the defensive coordinator for the Browns since 1980, was Rutigliano's replacement.

1985 was the year quarterback Bernie Kosar was selected by the Browns in the supplemental draft. Veteran Gary Danielson was brought in to start, and to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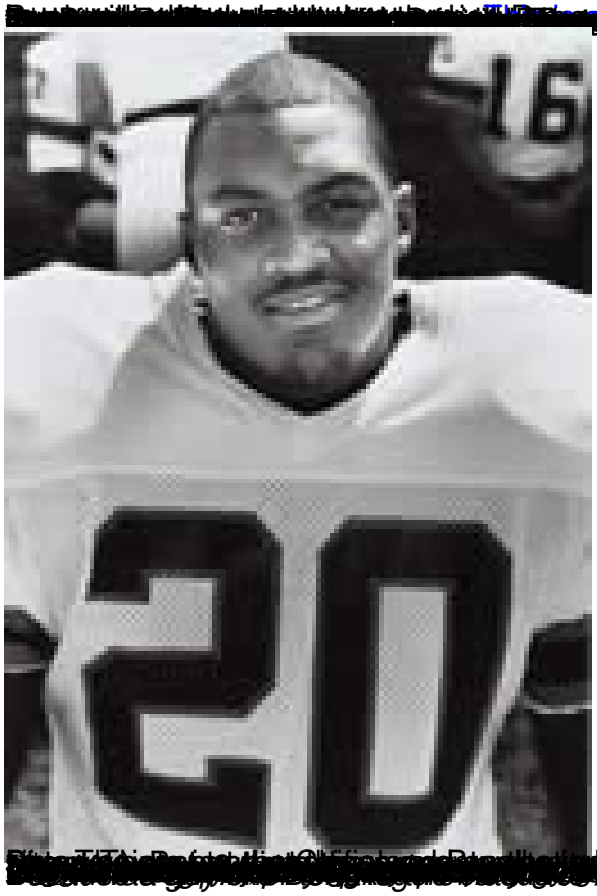
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