

Rethinking all 32 NFL Team Nicknames

Let me be blunt, it's time to rethink all 32 NFL team names. Fooey on tradition. That's strong language I know, but fooey! Pro sports teams should be crowned with or saddled with the name that best fits them, period. So, taking into consideration the origin of each name, what's happened since then, their performance, any moves, the host city's characteristics, the fan base, current league environment, social and political considerations, my overactive imagination, etc, I have a few suggestions to make.

If you don't want to read the entire schtick, just advance to your team; they are in alphabetical order by city. If that gives you trouble, see if singing the *ABC* song helps.

Arizona - I say we ditch the Cardinal name since it was inherited from Chicago by way of St. Louis and because the survivability of the cardinal as a bird species is marginal in this desert environment. Let's exchange it for something more indigenous, like the Arizona Dry Heat, although it opens the players up to charges that they lack humidity. Anyway, it sounds tougher than the Retirees.

Atlanta - When Atlanta was awarded an NFL franchise, a local radio station sponsored a "name-the-team" contest. The winner's rationale for choosing Falcons was (among other things) that this proud bird "never drops its prey." Scratch that. After letting a 25 point lead get away in Super Bowl LI, let's let the whole state help shoulder the loss. We'll call them the Georgia Peaches. Team motto: winning is peachy; losing is the pits.

Baltimore - Art Modell, owner of the then Cleveland Browns, moved his club when the city wouldn't change its name to "Buster" so they could be the Buster Browns (not really). But when relocating the club to Maryland, Modell sought to keep the "Brown" name but couldn't, so renaming the team was opened up to the fans. They chose as their mascot a character from the famous short story by Edgar Allan Poe, a favorite son of Baltimore. Ravens are cool, but if the city really wanted to go with Poe, they missed a great opportunity to be the Tell-Tale Hearts. They could have had a huge aorta decal on the helmet- or better yet- their helmets could have been molded in the shape of large aortas. The left sleeve and pant leg of their uniform could be vein blue, with their right side artery red. The offense could drive down the field with a menacing thump-thump booming from the stadium loudspeakers, intensifying as the team approached the goal line. Defenses would shudder.

Buffalo - The original owner and president of Frontier Oil chose the team name Bills in homage to both Frontiersman Buffalo Bill Cody and to the city's first professional football team, the Bisons. Buffalo has a buffalo on each helmet. It all seems a bit redundant to me. Why not just be Buffalo²? No good. The city itself has several nicknames: The Nickel City, The Queen City, and The City of Good Neighbors. Let's go with one of those. The Buffalo Nickels I can see, the Buffalo Queens, not so much. The Buffalo Good Neighbors is certainly genial, but maybe not the thing for an organization trying to grind you into the turf. The only other logical, yet painful choice is the Buffalo Wide-Rights, in memory of the closest the team ever came to being the champs.

Carolina - The owner's family chose Panthers as the team mascot because they thought the cat represented "what a team should be- powerful, sleek, and strong." The color scheme chosen to go with the name was black, blue, and silver. I don't think any locals objected to the mascot, but the colors generated some concern. So let's specify the Carolina Blue Panthers to negate any undesirable connotations which might be associated with the Black Panthers or the Gray Panthers.

Chicago - Originally the Decatur Staleys (the name of the sponsor's starch company), the team moved to Chicago and renamed itself the Bears, a take-off on the Cubs, with whom it shared Wrigley Field. I found out that the jersey colors were the same as the University of Illinois, just a shade darker. Then I found out that "Monsters of the Midway" nickname was taken from the University of Chicago. Great Scott! Isn't there anything original in Chicago to draw from? Sure, there's a rich history of crime and graft and corruption, but there's also Chicago style hot dogs and Chicago style pizza. How about naming their football team the Chicago Style? They could wear dark grey pinstripe uniforms and cleats that look like spats. Giving the cheerleaders toy Tommy Guns would be a nice touch, though it's starting to sound more like an XFL team.

Cincinnati - Fans may not know that original team owner, GM, and coach Paul Brown named the team "Bengals" to provide a historical link to the only pro football team ever located in the city, choosing it over fan favorite "Buckeyes." There is not a free Bengal Tiger in the Western Hemisphere, and the name Buckeyes is taken, so let's go with something uniquely Cinci. In the 1800s, the city known as "Queen of the West" acquired another nickname by virtue of being the country's largest pig processing center. In fact, herds of swine traveled the streets. Garbage was simply thrown into the middle of the street because citizens knew it would disappear. Abundant pig references can still be found throughout the city. So we can go one of two directions, change the team name or change the city name. That leaves us with either the Cincinnati Porkers or the Porkopolis Bengals. Who dey think gonna eat some goetta?

Cleveland - Although there are some different ideas, the Browns were almost certainly named after its first coach and GM, Paul Brown (yes, *that* Paul Brown). This left the team with a tough time trying to create a fitting mascot. Should they hire a guy to run around in a huge paper maché head of Paul Brown or maybe clad as a giant paint swatch? They decided on an elf-like character, who looked like he would be much more at home in a tree baking cookies. Why not switch the name to something more modern- the Cleveland Rock Stars- an allusion to the inductees of Cleveland's Rock & Roll Hall of Fame? The Dawg Pound would then become the Mosh Pit. With the Oakland team relocating, the crazies from Raider Nation might even switch their allegiance. They all look like KISS band members anyway.

Dallas - Original GM "Tex" Schramm almost went with Steers rather than Cowboys, but ultimately he decided that a castrated bovine whose destiny was almost certainly the slaughter house was not the image he wanted to portray. It is actually Dallas' neighbor, Ft. Worth that is known as Cowtown. Dallas has always fancied itself as a cosmopolitan center. So why not be the Dallas Cosmos instead, borrowing the moniker from the famous New York soccer club. "Cosmos" describes the universe as a complex and orderly system. It puts me in mind both of a city that's a little too big for its britches and of original coach Tom Landry's offensive scheme. And it's not too drastic a change. "How 'bout them Cosmos?"

Denver - Broncos is the result of another name-the-team contest. I am sure that wild horses are important to regional history, but Colorado is known for something entirely different now. As the capital of the state that opened the door to legal recreational marijuana use, I think it should be made to change to some related name such as the Denver Pot, Tokers, Reefers, Cannibas, Hash, Weed, or even the Denver Bronchitis. The late George Carlin would have made the perfect stadium announcer. I think Cheech and Chong are still around. The marijuana leaf would be a strong graphic for the helmet. Mile High Stadium could be shortened to just High Stadium. And so forth.

Detroit - Transplanted from Portsmouth, Ohio in the beginning, the new owner moved the Spartans to Detroit and changed their name to the Lions. Besides providing a tie-in with the existing baseball Tigers, the lion is king of the jungle, and this team was meant to rule the league. Well, here's to hoping. Actually, as one of football's oldest franchises, Detroit had its share of success for years, garnering four championships along the way. However, in the Super Bowl era, the Lions are the sole NFC team to never play for the title. So, until they get their mojo back, the Cowardly Lions is the shoe that will have to fit. Let's hope these lions have seen The Wizard, have taken, as he said in the movie, their "fortitude out of mothballs," and can now wear his Courage Medal as an emblem on their helmets to spur them on to the big game. As an added impetus, the band could play the Flying Monkey theme music behind the team on the field, although it would surely result in many false start and unabated to the locker room penalties. "Ain't it the truth, ain't it the truth?"

Green Bay - The only reason Green Bay's football team is called the Packers is because way back when, co-founder Curly Lambeau was a shipping clerk at the Indian Packing Company meat cannery. The company gave the team jersey money and their name. If the Bears had gone the same route, they would be the Chicago Starchers today. The thing the team has consistently packed that sets them apart is the stadium. Even though this Wisconsin club is the third oldest team in the NFL, and by far the smallest major league professional sports market in all of North America, Green Bay has played in their original city longer than any other team in the NFL. The major reason for this viability is that the Packers have been publicly owned since 1923. They belong to the community, not to an individual, private group, or corporate entity. The team has 360,760 owners for crying out loud! Every game is like a shareholder's meeting. Because the team isn't going anywhere (it is contractually bound to stay put), I hereby christen it the Green Bay Lifers.

Houston - The "Oilers" was fitting in its day as the name a city's football team whose economy was based primarily on "Texas Tea," but that organization vacated and set up shop in Nashville under an assumed name. So Houston was awarded another franchise who dubbed themselves the Texans, making it the sixth professional football club so named in the state's history. Get an imagination, people! The other finalists in the original name search were perfectly good: the Apollos, Bobcats, Stallions, and Wildcatters. The latter would be oil industry related, but with Houston being home to NASA's control center and its football team being the only one to have never reached even a conference championship (in 15 tries), I nominate the Houston Apollo 13s, after the ill-fated space flight with the similarly truncated mission. To commemorate the effects of the Apollo 13 explosion which scrubbed the moon landing, for each home game Houston could power down Reliant Stadium at the end of the third quarter and let the teams grope it out.

Indianapolis - The Colts name was chosen when the team played in Baltimore, which is known for its horse breeding history. You'll notice it's not in Baltimore anymore. The team was literally snuck out of town by owner Bob Irsay in 1984 to avoid seizure by the city. In his zeal to bug out, Irsay packed up a few items, not his own. Fortunately the band was able to retrieve their musical instruments in time. The moving vans arrived in their new home, Indy, which has its own kind of horse power. As a way of tying together the old and new heritages, the football team could play as the Indy Horsepower. I can see the cheerleaders circling the field in/on alternating colts and Formula One race cars... with an occasional moving van thrown in.

Jacksonville - This name-the-team contest which was held years before the expansion team ever played or was even awarded resulted in many names sensible for a Florida club such as the Sharks or the Stingrays. They went with Jaguars, which are not native to Jacksonville. However, the city's zoo did boast the oldest living jaguar in North America- "Zorro." The Jacksonville Zorros could be appropriate as the original Zorro wore a mask for anonymity, which many Jaguar fans of late may have considered (a la the New Orleans "Aints" bagheads of the 1980s). Zorro has since gone on to his reward. Therefore the team, which has never been to a Super Bowl, could be re-named the Jacksonville Dead Jaguars, though animal lovers would cringe. More fun would be the Jacksonville Teal Tongues. Look closely at the Jaguar logo and you'll see the original owner's wife's touch. For the team's first home game, everyone in attendance was given teal-colored candy to turn their tongue the same color as the jag and each other, a great bonding moment and a tradition I think should be revived, if only for mutual consolation.

Kansas City - Born the Dallas Texans, the team moved and wisely decided against being the Kansas City Texans. It is unclear whether the Chief moniker was a nod to previous Native American occupants or to the mayor at the time, whose nickname was "The Chief." A more contemporary connection to local culture could be achieved as the Kansas City BBQ. The league's first scratch-and-sniff uniforms would be very effective in distracting their opponents, especially in the trenches.

Los Angeles (AFC) - The first owner of this original AFL team also sponsored a name-the-team contest. Barron Hilton is reported to have quit looking at entries when he saw the name "Chargers," something to do with his new charge card or something. This team, which spent its first year in LA, is now going back. San Diego, who played host to the club for 51 years, was tired of playing. Area voters essentially said no to keeping the franchise if it meant continuing to be pawns in a financial chess game between the current owner and the city. The new owner had long threatened to move the club and finally did so with the other owner's approval. Nothing against the players and coaches, but I say the former Bolts organization should have to call the team the Bolter\$ or even the Overchargers (do I sound bitter?) as an ever-present reminder to the people of Los Angeles (and in every NFL market) that the almighty dollar still ultimately calls the shots.

Los Angeles (NFC) - The Rams, whose name was lifted from a NYC university, went from Cleveland to Los Angeles to St. Louis back to LA. Zoologically speaking, you're more likely to meet a male sheep in Southern California than you are on the East Coast or Midwest, but I still don't like hand-me-down (or jacked) mascots. LA's association with Tinseltown screams for something worthy of its lore, such as the Los Angeles Celebrities, Stars, Glitter, Glitz, Fame, Shades, or some such tag. Of course, stadium security would have their hands full trying to keep the paparazzi off the field. They'd try to pass themselves off as players, refs, cheerleaders, real photographers, etc. They'd hide in the Salvation Army barrel, anywhere to get unflattering pictures of the players. Or maybe the football team could call itself the Los Angeles Paparazzi, and then they could hound themselves, taking selfies at the most inconvenient times in the most outrageous places.

Miami - The traditional name-the-team contest drew almost 20,000 responses and over a thousand different suggestions, but one name was a duplicate times 622- Dolphins! One Marjorie Swanson won the contest tiebreaker by correctly predicting a tie in the upcoming Miami-Notre Dame game, aided by, of all things, a Magic 8-Ball. Co-founder Joe Robbie also invoked superstition when he introduced the team nickname saying that, according to sailors, it was bad luck to harm a dolphin. But the team suffered all kinds of harm starting out 15-39-2 until the advent of Don Shula, who introduced himself to town by saying that he knew of no magic formula for success, only hard work! And work they did with training camps that were the stuff of legends, but the result was unprecedented success over 26 years. Jimmy Johnson and Dave Wannstedt kept up the hard work and winning ways for the next eight years, but in the 13 years since, there have been eight losing seasons and only one division title. To inspire the team to suck it up and Dale (pronounced [DAH-leh], local slang for "go for it."), they must become the Miami Porpoises. Maybe then they will regain their porpoise.

Minnesota - This franchise, as well as Buffalo's, could be rudely labeled the 0-fors, as they have come up dry in a quad of Super Bowls. But hey, at least they got there! "Better to have loved and lost..." as someone said, although I don't think it was a football player. Anyway, Minnesota is another club whose team name was not arbitrarily chosen, but derived thoughtfully from its locale and fan base. Because the Land of 10,000 Lakes has a strong Nordic tradition, and because of these people's aggressive conquering bent, the team was named for the Vikings. The original ownership group was Skoglund, Haugrud, and Winter for crying out loud; what else are you going to call them? Sure, they could have named themselves the Eskimos after a pro football team that Haugrud had previously owned in the area, but we won't rub their noses in it.

New England - The Patriot name is, well, patriotic, but if the team founders had foreseen the current dynasty and its tight lipped ways, I think the New England Clams might have been appropriate (though chowder heads they ain't). For my money, with the host city being the liberal bastion that it is, the Boston Liberals rings true. I would put a large "L," on the helmet- not one on either side, but a singular "L" right on the forehead. Okay, the Patriots are anything but losers; it's just my sour grapes (and conservative bent) showing.

New Orleans - For those who have been to The Big Easy, especially during Mardis Gras, you know that one would be hard pressed to find enough true saints (marching in or otherwise) to field a full team. The city could rehash the Jazz nickname its one-time NBA team had before moving, name and all, to Salt Lake City, Utah (which is known, *not* for jazz, but for straight-laced choir music). New Orleans could honor its French heritage and even keep its fleur-de-lis, yet still avoid being called the Cajuns, by renaming itself the New Orleans Beignets. In winter, they could simulate snow by showering fans with powdered sugar dropped from the roof of the Superdome. Sweet... literally.

New York (AFC) - When the original team- the Titans- went belly up in 1963, an image makeover was in order. Allegedly, names under consideration were the Dodgers (taken), Gothams (would surely be shortened to Goths, giving the wrong impression), and Borros (this reference to boroughs- NYC neighborhoods- was too close to burros, or jackasses). Jets was chosen reportedly because the team would be playing close to the airport and because it reflected a new, modern approach. Well, I'm sorry folks, but the modern approach to football is to have a strong quarterback at the controls. The defining mark of the team this millennium has been the issues in finding its man to pilot the team on the field. What with the QB carousel, draft disappointments, butt fumbles, and all, they shall have to be, for the foreseeable future, the New York Pilotless Jets.

New York (NFC) - Way back in the early twentieth century, the football start-up in the Big Apple copped the Giants name from the city's baseball team (which has since switched coasts) hoping to start life with some fan capital. They should have instead taken the baseballs team's original name- Gotham- which seems appropriate for athletes playing in "Gotham City." If one digs too deeply into the origins of that name, however, it isn't terribly flattering. It comes from an English village across the sea whose name can be loosely translated "home of goats." It was also, according to folklore, inhabited by fools. Washington Irving first applied the term to the city long before anyone dreamed of paying groups of grown men enormous sums of money for smashing into each other. Lucrative or not, considering the potential long-term health risks associated with this occupation, maybe the Gothams is spot on.

Oakland - Oddly, the name-the-team fan contest produced the Señors, but newspapers complained that they couldn't reproduce the accent for the enya in headline type, so they went with the runner-up Raiders. Señor Nation doesn't have the same ring, anyway. No matter, the team will eventually be the Las Vegas "Something or Others." Raiders will never do in Vegas as the thought of raids make some business owners nervous. Winning has always been a hopeful outlook in Vegas, but with the odds stacked against newcomers, a more realistic approach, in Al Davis lingo, is, "Just break even, baby!" or even, "Just don't lose your shirt, baby!" Aww, the team will have to stick around Oakland for at least two years before it's Sin City stadium is built. But will the jilted Bay Area citizens show up? For the time being, their name shall be the Oakland Lame Ducks.

Philadelphia - Though the eagle seems like a fitting critter for the city that was at the heart of this country's founding, what has always characterized the football team throughout its history is its fans. They are a peculiar brand of Homo sapiens in Philly. The casual observer might get the erroneous idea that Philadelphians are fair weather fans. Nothing could be further from the truth. Just because at times it looks and sounds for like our friends from the City of Brotherly Love are going to empty the stands and storm the field to tar and feather their own players, it is no reflection on their hearts. These people are married to the team; they just suffer from acute empathy. God knows how Philly fans rejoice with the team in good times and suffer with them in bad times. These people just want the organization to suffer a little more than themselves for making them suffer with them (did I lose anybody there?). And don't even bring up the Santa Claus incident. So, just for no reason other than stress relief, we will let the team, and their fans, call themselves the Philadelphia Cowboy-haters (make that the Cosmos-haters).

Pittsburgh - Owner Art Rooney originally named the team the Pirates after the existing baseball club. After going 22-55-2 the first seven seasons, maybe he figured it was time to re-boot. After a poll, Steelers was chosen from among the fan offerings. I think they got it right! The name and logo reflect the region's chief industry, and the colors come from the city flag. However, any suggestion that Rooney put the Steeler logo on only one side of the helmet to help his players distinguish left from right is simply not true.

San Francisco - The 49ers are aptly named after the biggest thing to happen historically in the area-The California Gold Rush in 1849, when prospectors flocked to the call, "There's gold in them thar hills!" The football team's prospects have certainly been better, but that's prospecting for you. A moderately successful team hit the mother lode in the 80's and 90's with Walsh, Montana, Rice, and Young. The only Super Bowl appearance since then didn't pan out, but they will bounce back. There's gold in them thar jerseys! San Fran boasts a solid and highly profitable organization, so the 49ers it is.

Seattle - At the team's inception, a public naming contest yielded "Seahawks," another name for the osprey, a bird indigenous to the area. But as a reminder never to repeat the gaffe that cost them a second title, it might behoove them to switch to the Seattle Run-its. For many, what defines the franchise is its rather passionate and raucous fan base. Football-wise, they're not only the only game in town, but in the entire Pacific Northwest. The organization has retired jersey number 12, which belongs to its fans as a whole, the 12s. They make such a racket during games that they have actually registered on an earthquake detector. Opposing teams have taken to prepping for a game in Seattle the same way that the Navy SEALs tried to drive Manuel Noriega from his asylum in Panama, with blaring rock & roll. Therefore, as a tribute to the fans, plus a tie-in to their departed NBA team (at no extra charge), I suggest the Seattle Sonic 12s.

Tampa Bay - There's actually no city named Tampa Bay; it is a body of water, and the football team spent its first few seasons treading it, actually going down once, twice en route to a 0-26 start. The team was so bad that losing to the Bucs was job threatening for opposing coaches. Really. The Buccaneer or Bucs name seems more fitting now, but in the early going, it appeared to be a gross misnomer. It is derived from the historical pirate activity in the area. Pirates should inspire fear, of course, not pathos or humor. The logo and jersey design in 1976 only exacerbated the effect with its wimpy Bucco Bruce character and Creamsicle Orange color. Yikes. The team had only one good season in those outfits; more lasting success only came with a self-imposed makeover for the 1997 season. That's when Tampa Bay went from being the Buccos to the Bucs we know today, although the pendulum seems in danger of swinging back. Maybe if the team were threatened with having to wear the Creamsicle uniforms again, the entire Bay Area might snap to.

Tennessee - The Volunteer State is so named in honor of the men who stepped forward to serve under Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812 and who distinguished themselves in the Battle of New Orleans. If the University of Tennessee football team is the Volunteers, then we can call the professional football team the Voluntolds, as the team had no choice but to move in 1996 when then owner Bud Adams ripped them out from their Houston roots. While not pleasant, this moniker is preferable to one that draws attention to the organization's most defining- and agonizing- memory since winning the first two AFL championships as the Oilers. That is, the Tennessee Yard Shorts, referring to the drama of Super Bowl XXXIV's final play. To emphasize the point, Mike Jones could be paid to tackle the last player to come out of the tunnel as he is introduced at each home game. Ouch.

Washington - The use of "Redskins" has come under fire in recent years for being culturally insensitive to our Native American friends. I believe it can only be justified if the Cowboys agreed to play as the Palefaces, but then, two wrongs don't make a right. The names Nationals and Senators have suited our nation's capital in baseball, but for a game played on a gridiron and things being what they are politically, nothing but the Washington Gridlock would do. The team would naturally have to forfeit every game as both offensive and defense units would take the field pre-game, then refuse to budge come game time.

This then is how the divisions would look with all the new team names:

AFC East

Boston Liberals
Miami Porpoises
Buffalo Nickels
New York Pilotless Jets

AFC North

Pittsburg Steelers
Baltimore Tell-Tale Hearts
Porkopolis Bengals
Cleveland Rock Stars

AFC South

Houston Apollo 13s
Tennessee Voluntolds
Indy Horsepower
Jacksonville Teal Tongues

AFC West

Kansas City BBQ
Oakland Lame Ducks
Denver Weed
Los Angeles Bolter\$

NFC East

Dallas Cosmos
New York Gothams
Washington Gridlock
Philadelphia Cosmos-haters

NFC North

Green Bay Lifers
Detroit Cowardly Lions
Minnesota Vikings
Chicago Style

NFC South

Georgia Peaches

Tampa Bay Buccos

New Orleans Beignets

Carolina Blue Panthers

NFC West

Seattle Sonic 12s

Arizona Dry Heat

Los Angeles Glitter

San Francisco 49ers