

THU JUL 28, 2016

* * *

by *Albert Breer*

@AlbertBreer

EXTRA POINT

If the Browns want to know how to handle newly reinstated receiver Josh Gordon, they could do worse than dust off their 2013 blueprint.

That was the season that Gordon went off on the field—87 catches, 1,646 yards and nine touchdowns in just 14 games. But just as notably, it was also the only calendar year this decade during which the star-crossed stud was able to keep his nose clean.

The story of how the previous regime pulled it off starts with then-CEO Joe Banner and coach Rob Chudzinski recognizing early that there was a small group of problem guys on the roster who needed help, and then seeing that the team would need help in dealing with them.

The Browns conducted a search that led to the hire of performance psychologist James Bell, who'd been working with cricket players in England, and paired him with Cleveland Clinic psychiatrist Mayur Pandya. Those two created a general program and individual plans for players like Gordon, T.J. Ward and Phil Taylor.

With Gordon in particular, establishing trust was important, and not easy. Both Bell and Pandya were able to do it. The coaches got there, too.

Chudzinski, then-offensive coordinator Norv Turner and then-receivers coach Scott Turner each spent considerable time with the introverted Gordon, as did head athletic trainer Joe Sheehan, who worked closely with Pandya. And the key for them, as I understand it, was being crystal clear with him across the board, because the bookending piece to gaining his trust in 2013 was creating accountability.

It didn't mean yelling. In fact, that could be counterproductive, because of Gordon's insecurity. But it might mean calling him in the morning to make sure he was on his way to work, or staying on him about an assignment.

As the Browns saw it, Gordon had positive and negative influences in his life, and they did their best to try to steer him to the positive people (one such person was a brother of Gordon's who was living in California) and away from the negative.

Without question, it took a Herculean effort to keep Gordon in line—and despite all of this, the team was very close to dealing him to San Francisco that October.

But in the end, the results made it worth it. And the Browns felt good about it for reasons beyond just all those unimaginable statistics.

"I think he's intelligent and, deep down, a good person," said one former Browns staffer. "He does care about people."

Most of the organization has been overhauled in the two-plus years since, but EVP of football operations Sashi Brown and owner Jimmy Haslam were there. So they have some background on what will—and won't—work with Gordon.

But whether they can pull off what the organization did three seasons ago remains, very much, an open question.

• **Question or comment?** Email us at talkback@themmqb.com.



Josh Gordon missed the entire 2015 season and will miss the first four games of 2016 as well.

Photo: Scott Cunningham/Getty Images