



HERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF TALK lately (with fingers crossed) about a name for our city's future National Football League team, and I find disturbing one name that is often mentioned.

Naming the team the "Memphis Express" and establishing the team colors in purple and orange may seem like the obvious thing to do, considering our city's close ties with Federal Express, but it's also the wrong thing to do. It reeks of a small-town mentality, tying ourselves into one business. Memphis is bigger than Federal Express.

Though Federal Express is perhaps the best thing to happen to Memphis in its economic history, naming an NFL team after Fed Ex would be equivalent to Atlanta naming its football team the "Atlanta Cokes." If the namesake company should merge, change its name, or go out of business, where would that leave the team? And what kind of support are other corporations in Memphis going to give a team so closely identified with another company?

Memphis has a history of bad sport franchise names and nicknames: The Tams, the Rogues, the Showboats, the Southmen, the Grizzlies. Yeah, that last one really fits; I saw a bear just the other day, crossing Poplar.

After this awful string of bad names, what are we going to do? Leave it to another contest? Again? A contest? Come on! Look at our record with contests. How many times does history have to repeat itself for us to learn?

Coming up with a name is as much a science as it is an art. Leave it to the professionals. Naming products and services is serious business, and it should be viewed as such. Corporations spend millions of dollars each year paying professional organizations that specialize in naming businesses to come up with just the right name. Would the Acura be a lesser car without its name or the Die Hard battery be an inferior product? Probably not, but I can assure you that their sales would have suffered significantly. Smart corporations don't spend that kind of money without a return, and they don't hold contests to name products because it's not the smart thing to do.

A seven-year-old entering a contest *may* come up with a perfect name, but I doubt it.

Before we even consider a name, we need to develop strategic thinking. Who do we want to be? What's the image we want to project? We need to develop a mystique, a culture. A team's name is like a diamond—it's the setting which makes the diamond stand out. It's this culture that will determine the success of the marketing of the team. And out of this culture the right name will emerge.



by
Anderson
Humphreys

Artist's rendition of uniform and helmet for the hypothetical Memphis Heartbreakers. Illustrator: John Robinette. Art provided by Humphreys Price Advertising.

IN THE PINK

WHAT COLOR DOES A 290-POUND LINEBACKER WEAR? ANY DAMN COLOR HE WANTS

The City of Memphis is on the threshold of its greatest promotional opportunity ever. An NFL team will expose Memphis to millions of people across the nation every week. A three-hour commercial. We have a choice: We can develop a culture that is conservative and blend in, or we can be provocative and stand out. Blending in is guaranteed to create apathy among the public and the media, but by being different—even somewhat controversial—we have the opportunity to cause a sensation. I believe we can ill afford to become another expansion team that falls into obscurity.

In an attempt to make us much more open-minded, here's an attempt at developing this culture:

In counterpoint to the purple and orange "Express" mindset, try this on for size: A bright pink jersey with white numbers trimmed in red. Black pants with a pink stripe trimmed in red down the legs.

PINK? That's right. Pink! What color does a 290-pound linebacker wear? Any damn color he wants to, including pink. The color of Cadillacs, carnations, poodle skirts, and Memphis palaces—the color of things that are reminiscent of the 1950s and of Memphis.

But pink in the NFL? Exactly! It's almost an oxymoron a clash of opposites—the boy-named-Sue syndrome. I believe it will cause a fire storm of controversy and debate. Look what the Oakland (later Los Angeles) Raiders did by creating the “bad boy” image. The country loved hating them. And they will love hating us. Then something wonderful will happen. NFL splinter groups will form all over this country and their members will grow and grow into ardent Memphis fans.

Moreover, every primary color and combination of colors in the NFL has been used, reused, and over-used. Why not be unmistakable and stand out?

Also consider the high percentage of the American population that is now female, an emerging audience for the NFL. As the unisex trend continues into the Nineties, this identity would make us by association the sentimental favorites of over half the country.

Think of the companies (e.g., the cosmetics industry and the fashion industry) that would be attracted to our audacious image for product endorsements. And think of the additional exposure and revenue for Memphis and the team players.

Pink also conjures up the association with Memphis music and Elvis. Oh no! Not Elvis again? (Don't forget—Graceland pulls in over 600,000 visitors a year.) The Elvis phenomenon, like it or not, represents a tremendous opportunity. It's a Memphis asset like no other.

“Elvis gaudy” and pink go together like football and beer. And when you think about it, what's gaudier than football? We have a chance to make gaudy fashionable. And the color pink, masculine.

Let's explore further. Memphis's geographic location makes the city unique. An interesting thing happens when you plot the existing NFL cities on a map of the United States. You'll notice there's a huge gap in the middle of the country, and in the middle of that gap is Memphis. This “trade” area takes on the shape of a gigantic heart—the “Heart of Football Country.”

Now we have a heart. Memphis has always had soul. Tie it all in and this culture starts to develop. Now we have *Heart &*

Soul, a popular song of the “pink” era, a song so popular that most seven-year-olds can bang it out on a piano. Envision a slightly up-tempo marching band's version, and you have a fight song more memorable than Notre Dame's. We could virtually “own” *Heart & Soul*, just as the *William Tell Overture* is so indelibly linked to the Lone Ranger.

Now that we have established a culture (in part), let's turn back to the name. How about the Memphis *Soul*? Or better yet, try the Memphis *Heartbreakers*.

The Heartbreakers name could contribute further to the culture. For example, the team's cheerleaders could swoon and faint as the Heartbreaker players run onto the field, and “the swoon” could become the recognized salute to the team.

Language and ads could develop, such as “We're Going To Break More Than Hearts.”

Envision further a black helmet with six pinstripes resembling a guitar neck running from front to back, with a pink broken-heart logo on the

sides. Hear the band blaring out the lead-in to *Heartbreak Hotel*, just before the team hits the field.

These are only a few examples of this culture. The real genius will surface from the fans themselves, and what they develop would be far more imaginative than what any advertising agency would come up with.

But as marketers, we have to give the fans a kick start by establishing the basis of this culture. Purple and orange, for example, wouldn't do anything but promote one company. Conservative posturing doesn't promote, either. Give us something distinctive we can build on.

Our success depends entirely on the approach we take. Past NFL experiences tell us that our franchise will not be a winning team for several years. Until we start winning games—lots of games—we're going to be just another team. But if we call attention to ourselves, then no matter what our win-loss record, we'll receive all the attention we want from the ravenous, insatiable news media.

And Memphis, in turn, will benefit handsomely. We need to be bold and daring, so we attract not only the loyalty of our own fans, but the disdain of fans of other teams around the country. It's better to be hated than not to be thought of at all. ■

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