

1968-79 — THE ORIGINAL

The original Bengals uniform pictured here debuted when the team began play in the modern-era American Football League in 1968, and it defined the team's appearance well beyond the AFL's merger with the National Football League in 1970. Except for its socks and shoes, this uniform remained unchanged for 12 seasons through 1979.

The helmet was orange with a gray facemask. Simple in design, it had "Bengals" arched across both sides in block letters. The letters were black with a thin white outline.

This original uniform had both a black jersey and a white jersey. The black jersey had one orange stripe surrounded by two white stripes on each sleeve. Its uniform numbers were white block numerals, appearing on both the front and back. Likewise, its nameplate had white block letters. The white jersey had an orange stripe surrounded by black stripes on each sleeve, its uniform numbers were black block numerals on the front and back, and it had black block letters on the nameplate.

The team wore the same white pants with both the black and white jerseys of this uniform. The pants had one orange stripe surrounded by two black stripes on the side of each leg. The stripes ran the full length of the legs.

For its first seven seasons, the team wore two sock designs, based on whether it was wearing a black or a white jersey. With black jerseys, the team wore black-topped socks — white socks with a black top from the rim to the bottom of the calf. In the middle of the black top appeared one orange stripe surrounded by two white stripes, matching the striping pattern on the black jersey's sleeves. With white jerseys, the team wore white socks with mid-calf striping that matched the pants and the white jersey's sleeves — one orange stripe surrounded by two black stripes.

The team wore the socks pictured here through 1974. In 1975, the team began wearing only one sock design, regardless of whether it was wearing a black or a white jersey. That sock, pictured with the 1980 uniform illustration on the following page, was white, and at its mid-calf had one black stripe surrounded by two orange stripes.

The team primarily wore black shoes through 1973, and white shoes in 1974 and thereafter.

Interesting facts from this uniform era:

- Black shoes were in — then out of — style, and now they're back again:** During this time period, neither the AFL nor the NFL had rules requiring players on the same teams to wear shoes of the same color. In the franchise's first six seasons through 1973, most Bengals players chose to wear black shoes. In 1974, the team's dominant shoe color shifted to white. Not until 1990 did the NFL begin to regulate shoe colors. To help standardize uniforms, the league required each team to select a primary shoe color. The Bengals chose white, since that was still the players' color of choice at the time. The white shoes continued to remain in place through 2003. At the players' request, the team switched back to black shoes with its 2004 uniform redesign.

- Incorrect stripes were placed on cold-weather jersey:** For the entire run of this uniform, the stripes on the sleeves of the official Bengals jersey were slightly separated, while the stripes on the sides of the legs and around the calves of the socks were joined together. However, in wintry conditions throughout this time period, the team often wore special cold-weather versions of its jersey that had long sleeves extending to mid-forearm. Due to an oversight in the designing process at the manufacturer, the stripes on the cold-weather jersey were joined, just like the striping on

1968-79



the pants and the socks. The discrepancy was never corrected. The cold-weather jersey was worn as needed through the late-1970s. When the uniform was changed in 1980 — and again in '81 — the team chose not to create another cold-weather jersey. In wintry conditions from that point on, players instead wore jerseys with normal-length sleeves on top of long-sleeve undershirts.

1980 — THE CHANGE BEFORE THE STRIPES

While the overall original appearance remained intact, the Bengals' uniform underwent four alterations in 1980 to constitute a subtle — yet noticeable — uniform change.

On the helmet, the team made two alterations — it switched facemask colors from gray to black, and added black uniform numbers on the back. On the jersey, the team added uniform numbers to the sides of the sleeves, just above the

existing stripes. And on the pants, the orange stripe was widened to about twice its original thickness, though the width of the surrounding black stripes remained the same.

The socks pictured here — white, with one black stripe surrounded by two orange stripes at its mid-calf — had actually been the team's lone sock design since 1975.

Interesting facts from this uniform era:

- **Television changed football, including the uniforms:** The popularity of professional football grew immensely from the 1960s through the '80s, and much of the NFL's progress throughout that era was attributed to significant television exposure. Television changed the game in many ways, both substantially and minutely. When the Bengals added uniform numbers to the sides of their jersey sleeves in 1980, they were following a slow, evolving uniform design trend that started in the mid-1960s as a result of the league's desire to become more viewer-friendly on television. In fact, uniform numbers that were added to sleeves or shoulders were referred to as "TV numbers," since their placement was intended to aid broadcast announcers and viewers in quickly identifying players from various camera angles. The league did not have a rule requiring teams to place TV numbers on uniforms until 1991, though by that time nearly all uniforms already had them. Also in 1980, the Bengals added uniform numbers to the team's helmet. Those numbers, however, were affixed



NOTE: The socks pictured here were worn from 1975-80.

for the purpose of quickly identifying which player a helmet belonged to if it was taken off and set down during a game. There still is no league rule requiring teams to place uniform numbers on helmets.

- **The new pants were official in 1980, but debuted in '79:** While the Bengals did not officially add the pants with the widened orange stripe to their uniform until 1980, that design actually appeared on a limited trial basis in 1979. The 1979 trials were not team-wide, with only a few players wearing the new design during select games that season.

1981-96 — THE STRIPES

In 1981, the Bengals introduced a bold new uniform which was dramatically different than the relatively conservative designs the team had used since 1968.

Perhaps the most eye-catching distinction of the complete makeover was the team's new helmet. The helmet remained orange and retained its black facemask, but replacing the block-letter "Bengals" logotype were the team's new signature tiger stripes. Six black tiger stripes were placed on the helmet, extending from one side to the other.

Paul Brown, the team's founder who then held the title of Vice President and General Manager, said the team wanted a helmet that would be instantly identifiable with the Cincinnati franchise, something akin to the Baltimore Colts' horseshoe helmet and the San Diego Chargers' lightning bolt helmet.

"You couldn't read 'Bengals' on our helmet from a distance," Brown said at the time. "When you were far away, it looked like Cleveland's helmet."

The black jersey, the white jersey and the white pants of the new uniform featured a black tiger-stripe pattern on top of a wide orange stripe. On the jerseys, the pattern appeared on the shoulders. On the pants, it extended straight down the full length of each leg.

In addition, the uniform numbers on the front and back, as well as those on sides of the sleeves, were given orange outlines. The letters on the players' nameplates, however, remained solid color — white on the black jersey, and black on the white jersey — and were not given outlines.

The new uniform was assigned orange-topped socks — white socks with an orange top from the rim to the bottom of the calf. The team's primary shoe color remained white.

Interesting facts from this uniform era:

- **Sleeves became shorter over time:** From when the Bengals began play in 1968 through the mid-'80s, the sleeve length of the jersey was somewhat long by today's standards, reaching to just above the elbow. In the mid-'80s, sleeves began shortening over time to the current-day length, reaching only to the lower shoulder or upper biceps. By 1991, all of the team's jerseys were made with the shorter sleeves, and the original elbow-length sleeves were never produced again.

- **NFL marks were added in 1991:** Not pictured here, small NFL shield logos were added to the Bengals' helmets, jerseys and pants in 1991. All NFL teams added the logos as part of a minor league-wide alteration. On the helmets, the shields appeared in the rear left area. On the jerseys, it appeared on the front center of the collar. And on the pants, it was placed on the front left area just below the waist. In 2002, the NFL Equipment logo replaced the shield logos on the jerseys and the pants, though the shield remained on the helmet. Though they are not included on these 1981-96 uniform illustrations, the shield and equipment logos are incorporated into the 1997-2003 and '04-present illustrations on the following two pages, respectively.

- **The stripes did not remain entirely the same:** The black tiger-stripe patterns on the shoulders of the jersey and the legs of the pants during this era did not always perfectly match those on the illustrations pictured here. Though hardly noticeable, the patterns differed slightly from one uniform manufacturer to the next. In most cases, the stripes were less wide and more numerous. At the time, minor variations of this nature were considered acceptable as long as they were negligible and did not change the overall appearance of the uniform design.

1981-96



1997-2003 — THE UPDATED STRIPES

In 1997, the Bengals introduced alterations to their uniform which were termed “evolutionary, not revolutionary.” While the helmet remained unchanged and the general look of the uniform remained intact, several modifications were made on the jerseys, pants and socks.

Perhaps the most notable of the changes was the addition of the team’s new leaping tiger logo on the sleeves of the jersey. Because the new logo was placed where uniform numbers previously had been, the numbers on the sleeves were moved to the tops of the shoulders.

Also on the jersey, the black tiger-stripe patterns on the shoulders were simplified with wider stripes. The white jersey was altered further to include black trim on the sleeves and collar. And the letters on the nameplates of both the black jersey and white jersey were given orange outlines to match the jersey numbers, which had been given orange outlines in the uniform’s 1981 redesign.

On the pants, the black tiger-stripe patterns on the sides of the legs were simplified with wider stripes to match the new jersey stripes. And, the orange-topped socks the team had been wearing since 1981 were replaced by black-topped socks.

Interesting facts from this uniform era:

- **Another not so noticeable change was made in 1997:** There was another alteration made with this Bengals uniform change — not in design, but in makeup. All of the jersey numbers and the letters of the nameplates were converted from printed images to stitched fabric. The stitched fabric process — called “tackle twill” — produced more vivid colors, and the result was much more durable. With the nameplate

letters and the jersey numerals altered to tackle twill, the black tiger-stripe pattern on the shoulders and pants were the only remaining printed items. The tiger stripes were not changed because the additional stitching required for tackle twill would have significantly reduced the elasticity of the ends of the shoulders and the sides of the pants. And, since those were considered high-stretch areas, the print process remained the better choice for the tiger stripes.

- **Incorrect stripes were placed on 1999 pants:** Two years after the Bengals made the 1997 alterations, a new manufacturer of the uniforms mistakenly produced pants with the previous tiger-stripe pattern that was used from 1981-96. The discrepancy was considered minor, since most of the 1997 alterations had occurred on the jersey. In fact, the mistake wasn’t even noticed until after the 1999 season had started. Thus, the team wore the incorrectly-striped pants for the rest of the season, and the error was corrected for the following year.

1997-2003



NOTE: These black pants were worn in two games in 2003 only (see 2004-present interesting fact on the following page).

2004-PRESENT — THE NEW STRIPES

For the first time in 23 years and just the second time in team history, the Bengals' uniform underwent a complete redesign in 2004.

The team's signature tiger-striped helmet, widely considered among the most distinctive in football since its introduction in 1981, was not altered. The changes to the rest of the new uniform, however, were numerous.

The most noticeable differences from the previous design were the additions of a third jersey, a second pant and a second sock. To supplement its regular black and white jerseys, the team added a special-occasion orange jersey which could be worn in up to two games per year. Black pants were added to the lineup, marking the first time in team history that pants of a color other than white were officially part of the team's uniform. And, the orange-topped sock — worn in the 1981-96 uniform era — returned to the lineup as a mix-and-match option, joining the black-topped sock introduced in '97.

All three jerseys displayed a new tiger-stripe pattern on the shoulders. The black jersey featured orange sleeves, and orange trim on the sleeves and collar. The white and orange jerseys had black sleeves, with black sleeve and collar trim. The sleeves of all three jerseys were given white undersides. On the black and orange jerseys, the white undersides on the sleeves continued as wide stripes down the sides.

Modern, more rounded numerals replaced the block-letter uniform numbers that had adorned Bengals jerseys of the past, and the orange outline on the new numbers was given a shadow effect. In addition, the leaping tiger logo was removed from the sleeve, while the team's new striped "B" logo was placed in the center of the chest area, just below the neckline.

Both pants featured a new tiger-stripe pattern on the sides of the legs. However, unlike the old stripes, the new stripes did not extend straight down the full length of the legs. Instead, the new stripes curved slightly forward to a point just above the knees.

Lastly, the team chose to revert its shoe color from white to black, which had been the primary shoe color from 1968-73.

Interesting fact from this uniform era:

- 2004 black pants were the first to be official, but not the first to be worn:** The Bengals' uniform officially included black pants for the first time in team history in 2004. However, 2004 did not mark the first time the team had worn black pants in a game. A year before, in 2003, the team was granted by the NFL the option to use black pants in two games as part of the redesign process that resulted in the new 2004 uniform. The team exercised that option, wearing black pants on a temporary trial basis for both their 2003 regular-season opener and finale. Those 2003 black pants, however, possessed the team's older tiger-stripe pattern of that era (see 1997-2003 illustrations on previous page), and were never worn again. The black pants that were permanently added to the lineup in 2004 were updated with the new tiger-stripe pattern.

2004-PRESENT

