

Redskins Legacy: Redskins Upset Mighty Colts

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Sunday's opponent, the Indianapolis Colts, made its home in Baltimore for three decades before beginning play in the Midwest in 1984.

When the franchise was in Baltimore, not much of a rivalry existed between the Colts and the Redskins, who played in different divisions in the NFL and in separate conferences after the NFL-AFL merger in 1970.

Plus, their head-to-head clashes were mostly one-sided, with the Colts prevailing in 15 of 20 games.

One of Washington's five wins, however, stands as one of the most improbable performances in team history.

On Nov. 8, 1959 at Griffith Stadium in D.C., the 2-4 Redskins, riding a three-game losing streak and losers of three straight to the Colts, topped the defending NFL-champions, 27-24.



Heading into the game, the Redskins looked like nothing more than a doormat for their neighbors 40 miles to the north.

The 4-2 Colts featured seven future Hall of Famers who would key the team's march to its second straight NFL championship in 1959. Quarterback Johnny Unitas, headed for NFL immortality, was the biggest name among them. His golden right arm had thrown for touchdowns in a record 31 straight games.

No Redskins, in comparison, would be heading to Canton.

Furthermore, times were ominous for the Redskins. They were in the early stages of a miserable period that consisted of five wins from 1959 through 1961.

The Redskins possessed some talent in 1959, mostly on offense with quarterback Eddie LeBaron, the NFL's leading passer the previous year, backs Johnny Olszewski, Don Bosseler, Jim Podoley, Ed Sutton and Dick James, and ends Joe Walton, Bill Anderson and Johnny Carson. At kicker was the talented Sam "Sugarfoot" Baker.

Before a near-sellout crowd of 33,000 at Griffith Stadium, the Redskins' home for their first 24 seasons in D.C., Baltimore took a 3-0 lead in the first period. LeBaron, who completed 16 of 32 passes for 208 yards and two touchdowns on the day, hit Walton with a 19-yard scoring pass for a 7-3 game.

A Baker field goal put the Redskins up by a touchdown in the third period. But Unitas threw his first of two touchdown passes to end Jim Mutscheller for a 10-10 game.

The teams exploded for 31 points in the fourth quarter. LeBaron's 17-yard scoring throw to Anderson and Sutton's 22-yard option scoring toss to Walton, sandwiched around another Unitas pass to Mutscheller, left the Redskins leading, 24-17.

Baltimore tied the game on Moore's option pass to end Jerry Richardson, plus the conversion, and forced the Redskins to punt with time running out. But Unitas, the man credited for inventing the two-minute drill, threw a pass that defensive end Tom Braatz intercepted and returned to the Colts' 38.

Baker entered with 12 seconds left and kicked a 46-yard field goal that sent the fans into delirium as they celebrated the seismic upset.



Vice President Richard Nixon, a diehard Redskins fan who attended the game, bolted to the locker room to congratulate the Redskins players, owner George Preston Marshall and another Nixon, Redskins coach Mike Nixon.

"I have never seen a game to surpass this one," the vice president said.

One newspaper headline read, "Redskins' Victory Tremendous; Performance One of Best Ever."

"I got a nice letter the next day from Vice President Nixon on the fact that we played really well," LeBaron said.

"We should have played like we did in that game most of the rest of the season, but we didn't.

The rest of the season may well be forgotten. The Redskins lost their last five games by a combined score of 155-65. They finished 3-9 for the third time in the 1950s with a club that may have been the worst of the three.

The Redskins followed with their two worst seasons in team history, 1-9-2 in 1960 and 1-12-1 in 1961.

But one game will stand out – that day in 1959 when the Redskins performed the unthinkable against those guys with the horseshoe on their helmets.

Mike Richman is the author of [The Redskins Encyclopedia](#) and the [Washington Redskins Football Vault](#). He hosts a podcast called "Burgundy & Gold Flashback." His web site is redskinshistorian.com. Check out his Facebook [Friend](#) and [Fan](#) pages and follow him on [Twitter](#).

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