



Redskins Legacy: 'Over The Hill Gang' Spills Oilers

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It was 1971, the Redskins' first season under coach George Allen.

Coming off a 6-8 year and with only one winning season since 1955, the Redskins had become the talk of the NFL by winning their first three games against the St. Louis Cardinals, New York Giants and Dallas Cowboys – all on the road.

The time had come for the veteran-laden team known as the "Over The Hill Gang" to open at home.

Their opponent: the Houston Oilers.

The Oilers were the predecessor to the Tennessee Titans, who visit FedExField today. They were a charter member of the American Football League in 1960 and won two AFL championships before taking part in the NFL-AFL merger in 1970. The Oilers moved to Tennessee in 1997 and became the Titans.

In the minutes leading up to the first-ever regular-season clash between the Redskins and Oilers on Oct. 10, 1971, a record crowd of 53,041 at RFK Stadium greeted their surging team with a three-minute standing ovation. Redskins players were introduced one-by-one, with the loudest cheers going to quarterback Billy Kilmer, one of the many season veterans Allen had traded for in the offseason. He had replaced the injured Sonny Jurgensen in the preseason, playing masterfully in the first three games.

Banners hung all around the stadium:

- "Hail to the Over the Hill Gang"
- "Deadskins Come Alive"
- "Life Begins at 30"
- "Kill 'em Kilmer"
- "Like A Fine Wine, the Redskins Have Come Of Age"
- "There is Never a Blue Monday when the Redskins Play on Sunday. We're No. 1."

The Redskins' offense sputtered on that damp day, failing to score a touchdown on four possessions inside the Oilers' 20. But the defense compensated by holding Houston in the second half to three points and five completions for 62 yards. Defensive end Ron McDole and linebacker Jack Pardee, two of the "old geezers" acquired by Allen in the 1971 offseason, intercepted passes.



Redskins kicker Curt Knight also did his part, producing 16 points in a 22-13 victory that improved Washington to 4-0.

Knight booted five field goals, the first three of which gave the Redskins a 9-0 lead in the second quarter. The Oilers cut the margin to two on quarterback Charley Johnson's five-yard scoring pass to running back Leroy Sledge and a conversion by Mark Moseley, the kicker acquired by Allen in 1974 in another of his clever signings. Moseley played 13 seasons in D.C. and stands as

the Redskins' all-time leading scorer.

McDole, who starred for the AFL's Buffalo Bills in the 1960s, scored the Redskins' only touchdown against Houston. In the second quarter, he saw a running back swing out, read the play as a screen pass and intercepted Johnson's pass, returning it 18 yards to the end zone.

Moseley's 42-yard field goal before halftime and his 25-yarder in the third period created a 16-13 game and a tense situation for the Redskins and their faithful.

A few minutes later, the Oilers were in position to tie the game, but Moseley's 54-yarder was way short. Knight converted two field goals in the fourth period to account for the final nine-point margin.

Washington's offense had a forgettable day, gaining 251 yards and converting 4-of-17 third downs. Kilmer went 10 for 21, but he had a scoring pass nullified because of a penalty. He also threw no interceptions, telling *The Washington Star* that was the "important statistic. I just wasn't going to put the ball up for grabs. Johnson threw interceptions to McDole and Pardee, and it cost them 10 points."

The Redskins beat the Cardinals the next week to improve to 5-0. They finished 9-4-1 to earn a Wild Card spot, losing to the 49ers in their first postseason appearance since 1945, 24-20.

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