



[PRINT](#) [CLOSE](#)

Redskins Legacy: A Crazy Finish Vs. The Eagles

Posted Sep 18, 2014



Mike Richman
Redskins Historian
RedskinsHistorian.com





In its 36-year history as the Redskins' home, RFK Stadium was the site of many wild games.

You had days, for instance, when the Redskins recovered from a huge deficit to pull out a last-minute 37-35 win over the Raiders in 1983, or when they yielded 522 passing yards to an aging quarterback, Boomer Esiason, in a heart-wrenching 37-34 overtime loss to the Cardinals in 1996.

Another wild one took place 25 years ago. It's remembered for a freak ending that would haunt the Redskins in a season when the 10-6 squad barely missed the playoffs.

With the Eagles in town in the second game of the year on Sept. 17, 1989, the Redskins built a 20-0 first-quarter lead behind two touchdown passes by quarterback Mark Rypien, an 80-yarder to receiver Gary Clark and an 11-yarder to running back Earnest Byner. Fellow back Gerald Riggs ran 41 yards for another score.



But Philly chipped away behind an All-Pro performance from quarterback Randall Cunningham, who signed a five-year contract extension that morning. He responded by posting team records in completions (34) and passing yards (447) to go with five touchdown passes. One of his scoring throws cut the lead to 37-35 with 1:48 left.

Riggs, who rushed for a team-record 221 yards that day, ran 58 yards to the 22 on the next

possession, apparently icing the win. But he fumbled a few plays later after bumping into center Raleigh McKenzie. Linebacker Al Harris picked up the ball, and while being pulled down, seemed to push it to safety Wes Hopkins in what looked like a forward exchange.

But no whistle was blown, and Hopkins raced 77 yards down the sideline as Redskins fans looked on in horror.

Cunningham then found tight end Keith Jackson, who caught three touchdowns that day, alone in the back of the end zone on a 4-yard pass for the winning score in what *Philadelphia Daily News* sportswriter Ray Didinger described as a "ridiculous, amazing, preposterous comeback win."

Eagles players, ecstatic over the improbable NFC East victory, carried coach Buddy Ryan off the field.

To former Redskins middle linebacker Neal Olkewicz, who recovered a fumble in that game, losing like that so early in the season was a "big shock."

"It was just one of those days when Randall Cunningham was hot," **Olkewicz said on the podcast *Burgundy & Gold Flashback***. "The weather was hot, and we weren't used to having those high-scoring games, but as it turned out it was."

While most observers pointed after the season to a 13-3 loss to Dallas, which finished 1-15 under first-year coach Jimmy Johnson, as the reason the Redskins failed to make the playoffs, Redskins coach Joe Gibbs singled out the 42-37 loss to the Eagles.

"We were just icing it at the end of the game, and Gerald Riggs fumbled the ball," said Gibbs, sounding incredulous even years later. "That ball was one foot from going out of bounds, and they picked it up. It's unbelievable. That was one of the toughest losses I've ever had. We had more than 400 yards of offense and lost the game."

That game followed a demoralizing loss to the Giants in the season-opener. The Redskins held a late 24-21 lead in a Monday night game at RFK, but kicker Raul Allegre booted two field goals, including a 52-yarder on the last play to account for a 27-24 Giants victory.

The Redskins rebounded to win four of their next five games. And by season's end, they had the makings of a playoff-caliber team. They set a franchise record for total yards (6,253), posted their best turnover ratio (5) in several years and were one of only two squads with an offense and defense that ranked in the league's top 10.

Plus, they finished as one of the NFL's hottest teams with five straight wins and six in their last seven games.

But one wild game with a bizarre ending would play a major role in depriving the Redskins of their sixth post-season appearance of the Gibbs-1 glory era.

*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**.*