



Redskins Legacy: Malinchak Stresses Special Teams

Posted Sep 4, 2014



Mike Richman
Redskins Historian
RedskinsHistorian.com



With the 2014 season upon them, the Redskins and new head coach Jay Gruden would welcome a return to the days when the franchise was the gold standard of special teams.

Last season, that unit was anything but. Often appearing out of sync, special teams allowed three punt returns and one kickoff return for touchdowns and committed a series of embarrassing gaffes. In one game, the Chargers blocked two field goal tries, after not blocking any since 2002.

Bill Malinchak, the greatest punt blocker in Redskins history, played during the golden era of Redskins special teams, a period that took hold in the 1970s under coach George Allen, a special teams genius.

Malinchak, who blocked four punts during his years in D.C. from 1970 to 1976 (he sat out the 1975 season), learned from Allen that preparation is critical in that phase of the game, just as it is on offense and defense.

"I still think that special teams is the most under-appreciated, under-used of the three (phases), offense,



defense and special teams,” Malinchak said on the podcast ***Burgundy & Gold Flashback***. “Last year, I did see a few games, actually, and it was surprising because as I remember the Redskins always dominated on special teams. I think back when George Allen was coach, we were totally prepared for each game. We spent at least two hours a day on special teams.”

Malinchak and his special teams brethren soaked in the pre-game pep talks delivered by Allen, a brilliant motivator.

“The one thing that made us special back then was that George Allen had his hands on the special teams,”

Malinchak said. “He would always get the players and call them over individually on a Friday, usually, Saturday, and he would take me over, for instance, and he would talk to me about what I was expected to do playing on the special teams, that I had to make a big play.

“And I think that at the end of that conversation ... I thought the game rested on my shoulders, and I think every other special teams player did, too, because they probably got the same speech, that we had to make a big play. When you do that on special teams, you just don’t go through the motions.”

A few game-altering plays by Redskins special teams wouldn’t hurt in their season-opener on Sunday against the Texans in Houston. Malinchak delivered a few of those in another season-opener on the road, a 1972 Monday night clash against the Vikings at old Metropolitan Stadium in Bloomington, Minn.

Against a Vikings team that had reached the playoffs four straight years, including an appearance in Super Bowl IV, Malinchak blocked a punt, scooped up the loose ball and ran 16 yards for a touchdown in the first quarter. In the fourth quarter, he recovered a fumble on a Redskins kickoff that set up another touchdown.

The Redskins won, 24-21, building early momentum in a season when they finished 11-3, captured the NFC East and appeared in Super Bowl VII.

To Malinchak, that game was his greatest individual performance in his 10-year NFL career.

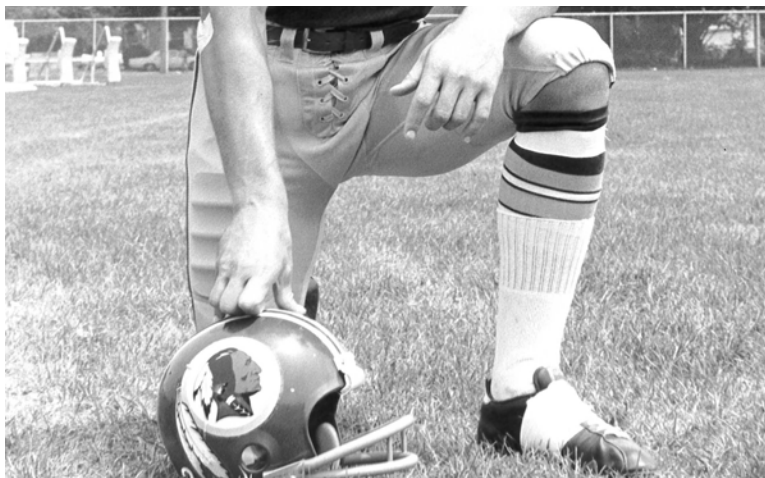
“Absolutely,” he said. “I think it was so big because at that time, we had had some success in ’71 and had gotten to the playoffs, and (1971) was George’s first year, and this was a huge game because Minnesota was an excellent team then, and it was at Minnesota.”

Malinchak, a wide receiver by position, played his first four seasons in Detroit (1966-69), leading the Lions one year with 26 catches for 397 yards and four touchdowns. He signed as a free agent with the Redskins early in the 1970 season.

In addition to Allen, he learned under Marv Levy, the Redskins’ special teams coach in 1971 and 1972. Levy later coached Buffalo Bills teams that played in four straight Super Bowls in the 1990s and, like Allen, is in the Hall of Fame.

Levy once called Malinchak the greatest punt blocker ever along with Steve Tasker, who deflected seven punts for Buffalo in the 1980s and 1990s.

“Bill Malinchak had a technique for blocking punts that made so much sense that others didn’t use,” Levy said in 2003. “It’s a technique I’ve taught ever since to block a punt. Everybody comes in with their hands up. Bill split his hands out at the foot to block that ball off the foot. His technique was not to raise his hands and block the kick, because the ball rises much faster than your hands, but to block it before it rises. That’s what I taught, and that’s how Steve Tasker became a fantastic punt blocker.”



*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**.*

.

.

.