

NFL Coach George Allen Lived To Win

By MICHAEL RICHMAN, FOR INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

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Allen said upon taking over the Redskins in 1971 that they would "win at once," then led them to the playoffs. AP [View Enlarged Image](#)

He thus asked Bill Malinchak, a Redskins punt-blocking specialist who had retired to pursue a career on Wall Street, to return for that game. Allen was confident he could squeeze a big play out of him.

A Kick Out Of Football

Allen's Keys

Inducted posthumously into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2002.

Overcame: Taking over two NFL doormats.

Lesson: Hard work breeds success.

"He was passionate. He felt he owed it to every coach, every player, every fan to use every waking moment of every day to help the team win. He felt it was joyous to win and painful to lose," said son Bruce Allen.

As the coach envisioned, Malinchak blocked a punt in a Redskins win that clinched a playoff spot.

Malinchak's decision to suspend his lucrative white collar career and return to the Redskins speaks to his admiration for Allen.

"George was certainly the greatest coach I ever played for," he said. "He really prepared ballplayers for games probably as good or better than anybody ever, not only with execution, but mentally, too. When you went into that game, you felt like the game rested on your shoulders. He made you feel that every player needed to make a big play. That's a special quality. If you wanted to play football, you'd want to play for George Allen."

Many players felt that way about Allen (1918-90), whose bust is in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

His winning percentages, .712 in the regular season and .686 including playoffs, are third best among coaches with at least 100 victories.

He made the playoffs seven times, with one Super Bowl appearance, and turned perpetual losing squads, the Redskins and Los Angeles Rams, into title contenders. He never suffered a losing year in 12 National Football League seasons.

Allen is revered, too, for implementing revolutionary schemes on defense and special teams.

He introduced the nickel alignment with five defensive backs and helped mold the blitz into a bona fide weapon.

George Allen channeled almost every minute into winning.

He'd analyze tape after tape of previous games seeking any way to gain an edge on the football field.

At the same time, the workaholic wanted his assistants and players to know of his dedication so they'd adopt the same approach.

"He reveled in having that reputation," Marv Levy, an assistant coach under Allen for three seasons, told IBD. "If you went home at 11:30 at night and were done with your work, you could count on there being a note on your desk the next morning: 'Marv, could you get me the film of so on and so forth,' signed by George Allen at 12 midnight. He worked hard to let you know he was that way."

Allen's perseverance led him to spot chinks in his opponents.

Case in point: He noticed a flaw in the Cowboys' punting unit prior to a game between his Washington Redskins and Dallas in 1976.

In a 1972 Redskins playoff win over Green Bay, his daring quarter defense, a five-man front, stifled the Packers' potent running game. He kept offenses guessing by using some 150 defensive audibles.

His defenses in Los Angeles and Washington were annually among the stingiest in the league. As an assistant, he coached a 1963 Bears defense that made them NFL champions and is considered one of the greatest in history.

Allen deemed special teams critical in an era when they were mostly an afterthought. Unlike other coaches, he instructed that unit to practice long hours and depended on it for at least two victories per season through blocked kicks, kick returns and turnovers.

Once, Redskins defensive end Ron McDole blocked a field goal on the last play of a 1975 game against the Minnesota Vikings to preserve a 31-30 triumph.

Allen also hired one of the NFL's first special teams coaches, Dick Vermeil, in 1969.

"There was nothing, nothing left to chance," said Bill Brundige, a former Redskins defensive tackle. "George always ran the defensive meeting. Once, he said, 'Boys, let me tell you how to win. We've got to have three turnovers on defense and one score. We also need five big plays from special teams.'"

Allen made other unconventional decisions, too. When a free agency market similar to today's unfettered system opened up for just one season, 1976, he signed New York Jets running back John Riggins to a \$1.5 million, 15-year contract, an extraordinary deal at the time. Riggins, a Redskin for nine seasons, became the team's all-time leading rusher.

Stop The Press

Allen also treated reporters differently than many of his peers. He disliked gotcha questions and sometimes closed off practice to journalists, fearing they would give intelligence to the opposition.

"He was just ahead of his time," said Bruce Allen, one of George's sons and the Redskins' current general manager. "If you listen to coaches today in all of sports, I don't think they disclose as much as the media would like."

George Allen knew his passions from the start and followed them.

In 1948 he wrote a master's thesis at the University of Michigan titled "A Study of Outstanding Football Coaches' Attitudes and Practices in Scouting." In the document, he emphasized the importance of gathering data on an upcoming opponent and the proper use of that information. The paper included precisely drawn reproductions of obscure charts and diagrams.

Allen completed the thesis "with the amazing thoroughness that was to become his trademark," Bill Gildea and Kenneth Turan wrote in the 1972 biography that used the coach's line for its title, "The Future Is Now."

"Allen deals in painful seriousness with scouting on the college, professional and high school levels, delving into such weighty matters as how many scouts should be sent to a game, where they should sit, how many games they should attend, what and how much they should write down, and more," Gildea and Turan wrote.

Allen was long a stickler for details, some that most people considered trivial but which he believed to be vital. He'd ask team employees, "Is what you're doing helping us win football games?"

Seeing a picture hanging crookedly on the wall, he'd shake his head and say, "Sometimes, I wonder if the organization knows what winning is all about."

Clean Winner

Once before a game in Green Bay, he saw trash at Lambeau Field and considered that a sign the Redskins would win because the Packers didn't pay attention to details. Final score: Redskins 17, Packers 6.

"To win a championship," Allen once said, "you have to have everything going together, even the girl at the switchboard. The league is that tough and that balanced."

Allen also showed a keen eye for talent. In his long hours in the film room, he broke down the strengths and weaknesses of players on his and other teams. Doing so helped him pull off masterful trades.

When Rosey Grier, part of the Rams' famed Fearsome Foursome defensive line, was ruled out for the 1967 season due to an injury, Allen traded for Detroit Lions superstar Roger Brown.

Brown played the next three seasons on the revamped unit, which remained a formidable defensive line on Rams teams that won two division titles and at least 10 games each year from 1967 to 1969.

After becoming Redskins coach in January 1971, Allen quickly obtained New Orleans Saints quarterback Billy Kilmer for a reserve linebacker and two draft choices.

Kilmer was an average passer, but Allen noticed a competitive fire that made the UCLA product a winner. The coach named him a backup to Sonny Jurgensen, one of the league's premier passers, so at first the deal hardly looked crucial.

That is, until Jurgensen suffered a preseason injury that summer.

In came Kilmer as the starter, and the Redskins rolled to their first playoff appearance in a quarter-century. He quarterbacked four other

Redskin playoff teams during the Allen era.

"George was a great trader," said Ted Marchibroda, an assistant coach under Allen. "I think you were at a disadvantage when trading with him. He could evaluate players extremely well."

Said long-time Redskins statistician Joe Band: "George Allen was a unique man. ... He loved anyone who challenged him and said he couldn't do anything."

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