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After Further Review: Former Bowie resident, journalist authors "The Redskins Encyclopedia"



By Jake Linger



True story: Every Monday, I prefer to wear an NFL jersey to the Blade-News office so I can continue my celebration of the greatest time of the year, which is, of course, football season. Normally, the selection is either former Denver Broncos "Easy" Ed McCaffrey or John Elway. Every now and then, I will even break out my T.O. jersey - but at least it was his San Francisco jersey, back when he was simply Terrell Owens.



Last week, however, I felt like a homer. The Redskins had just lost that game versus Green Bay, but I was still feeling confident that the 'Skins were headed in the right direction. So, I found my brother's LaVar Arrington jersey and I threw it on.



It fit magnificently, by the way. It is really tough being a skinny guy and trying to find a football jersey that fits well.



Once I had a seat at my desk, I decided to head to McDonald's for a little early lunch. The car behind me in the drive-through - yes, I drove less than 1/8 mile away from the Blade-News campus - honked its horn at me, as if I could go anywhere sandwiched in a drive-through. But, I noticed that a man had exited the large SUV and was approaching my vehicle on the passenger side. Thanks to global warming, my windows were fully down in mid-October, so the man put his head in my window and held out his fist for a "fist pound." Can you believe it was LaVar "bleeping" Arrington? Unreal! Arrington, who now works for Comcast SportsNet, was incredibly nice and even returned to my vehicle and handed me a small sports card case containing two of his autographed cards.

It's just one of those things about living in the D.C. area. The Redskins have always been accessible and involved in the community, whether it was during their careers or even following their playing days. And many anecdotes similar to,

but not including, my own are contained in "The Redskins Encyclopedia," written by former Bowie resident and life-long Redskins fan Michael Richman.

Richman became hooked on the Redskins in the early 1970s, by his own accounts, and admits that he would "get really depressed when they lost and elated when they won." After studying journalism at the University of Maryland, College Park, Richman became a freelance writer for the Associated Press in the '90s and was frequently assigned to cover Redskin games - indeed, a tough life. He was then approached by team owner Daniel Snyder to contribute to the Redskins' official team magazine. In 2000, Richman sold the idea of "The Redskins Encyclopedia" to a publisher, but because of his full-time job and switching publishers in 2005, the book took seven years to complete. Granted, let's not forget about the intense research that was involved in this project. Even for the most devout Redskins fan - and trust me, Richman is one - there are interviews to be conducted and statistics to be scoured over. "You can't write a book without the passion," said Richman.

That passion led Richman to some really crazy stories that are included in "The Redskins Encyclopedia." How many true 'Skins fans knew that in 1975 Andre the Giant was "almost" a Washington Redskin? How many younger fans of today know that Vince Lombardi was not just the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, but that he also spent a season as the coach of the Redskins? By Richman's accounts, "The Redskins Encyclopedia" is the "most comprehensive journalistic account of the club ever." And by my accounts, I cannot fathom that there could be any more information regarding the team than what is already contained in the book.

As Redskins fans, we all know how important the team is to the city of Washington, D.C., and its suburbs. But, one of the things that Richman accomplishes with his book is to thoroughly relay to the reader how historically relevant the team is to U.S. history. In 1961, the Redskins were forced by the U.S. government to sign a black player because then-owner George Preston Marshall was a documented racist and refused to sign any player of color. This was happening during the height of racial tensions across the nation! Imagine the NFL - and especially the Washington Redskins - today without its entire cultural diversity and then think about where the league would be and where we would be as a country without ever having known the likes of Art Monk, Darrell Green or Doug Williams, who became the first black quarterback to win the Super Bowl. Dignitaries, actors and other athletes are fans of the Redskins and each week may be spotted walking the sidelines of FedEx Field in Landover.

Anything I have to say about "The Redskins Encyclopedia" is simply moot. I spent my first 10 years on this planet as a Redskins fan, but then in an effort to rebel perhaps, I spent a few seasons as a Cowboys fan. Now, splitting time between the Redskins and Broncos is a treat.

My heart is blue and orange, but I bleed burgundy and gold!

But, my point is that my points are moot because there is so much information regarding the Redskins in this book, that even my most brilliant observations regarding my hometown Redskins are irrelevant compared to what the reader will find in the fine historical account of one of the greatest franchises in all of sports.

Richman believes that the fans "will learn so much about Redskins history ... and really enjoy reading it."

Indeed!

"The Redskins Encyclopedia" information can be found by visiting Richman's Web site, www.redskinshistorian.com.

Published 10/25/07, Copyright © 2007 [The Bowie Blade](#)