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Five myths about the Redskins

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They are a Washington institution, the top source of sports entertainment in a politically obsessed city. Whether [the Redskins](#) win or lose each week affects the mood of entire mid-Atlantic region, and their inspirational season-opening victory over the Giants last Sunday is already spawning [optimism for the 2011 season](#). The franchise has struggled since winning three Super Bowls way back when. To see if they can make it back to the top, let's dispense with some popular myths about the burgundy and gold.

1. Get rid of Dan Snyder, and all will be well.

During Snyder's first decade as owner, streams of Redskins and pro-football fans considered him a liability to the team. After all, they asked, how could the Redskins win a Super Bowl, or even challenge in the NFC East, with an impulsive, micromanaging boss? His propensity for meddling in personnel decisions, his reckless spending on free agents (see Deion Sanders, Adam Archuleta, [Albert Haynesworth](#)) and his inability to maintain coaching continuity made him seem clueless about what it takes to win in the National Football League.

But Snyder, who bought the team in 1999, has matured. He's realized that patience and a hands-off approach are imperative to success over the long haul. The [dismissal of his longtime right-hand executive](#), the polarizing Vinny Cerrato, late in the dreadful 2009 season was an important step. He hired a true general manager in Bruce Allen and a [two-time Super Bowl-winning coach in Mike Shanahan](#), and he has stepped aside to let those two experienced football minds make personnel decisions.

Snyder has a fierce desire to reach the pinnacle in the NFL. It's not going to happen instantaneously, but he's finally going about it the right way.

2. It will never be as good as the Gibbs era.

It's entirely conceivable that the Redskins could someday duplicate or exceed coach Joe Gibbs's feats in the 1980s and early 1990s, when the team won three Super Bowls. Yes, the NFL is a parity-driven league now, and some experts argue that building an organization capable of reaching multiple Super Bowls in a short time span is unrealistic. But just look at the 21st-century Patriots and Steelers — it can be done.

For the Redskins to become a powerhouse, they must hold on to a talented scouting staff; maintain a competent front office that makes calculated personnel decisions through the draft, trades and free agency; and acquire players hungry to win. (No more mercenaries such as Haynesworth.)

Just as important, the Redskins are a lot younger than in recent years; the team must continue infusing the roster with youth and speed. This season's opening-day roster included nine rookies and 25 players with three years or fewer of pro experience. Two of those rookies, linebacker Ryan Kerrigan and nose tackle Chris Neild, starred in the [Redskins' 28-14 win last Sunday against the Giants](#).

3. President Richard Nixon called a play during a 1971 playoff game.

This story is [ingrained in Redskins lore](#), but the facts are open to interpretation. Nixon never called a play during the Redskins' 24-20 loss to San Francisco in the the 1971 playoffs, and he didn't phone anything in from the Oval Office to the sidelines. He did, however, suggest plays in the days prior to the game.

Two Redskins at the time, defensive end Bill Brundige and quarterback Billy Kilmer, told me about the president's suggestions. According to Brundige, coach George Allen said Nixon had remarked in a phone conversation that he'd "like to see" three particular plays against the 49ers, including a draw to fullback Charley Harraway and a reverse to wide receiver Roy Jefferson. Nixon and Allen were good friends; a dozen of Nixon's secretly recorded White House tapes were chats with the Redskins' coach.

Kilmer said he was in Allen's office a few days before the game when Nixon called for the coach, who handed Kilmer the phone. As

Kilmer put it, the president said “it’d be good” if the Redskins ran a reverse at some point against the 49ers. The quarterback, who called nearly all of his plays, said that late in the first half a call for an end-around came in from the sideline, from either Allen or offensive coordinator Ted Marchibroda. The Redskins, leading 10-3, were on the 49ers’ 8-yard line, and a touchdown or a field goal would have provided valuable momentum heading into the locker room at halftime.

The Redskins ran a risky end-around to Jefferson, who was thrown for a 13-yard loss. Their field goal attempt two plays later was blocked, and the reenergized 49ers went on to win.

4. The Cowboys remain the Redskins’ biggest rival.

Washington-Dallas was once among the fiercest rivalries in pro sports, as intense as Yankees-Red Sox or Lakers-Celtics. Allen once even offered to fight Cowboys coach Tom Landry at midfield.

But since Gibbs resigned after the 1992 season, the rivalry has lost its luster. “Dallas Week” doesn’t resonate like it once did. Neither squad has been a contender for some time, and games between the two with playoff implications have been virtually nonexistent lately. Many current players from both teams don’t even know much about the old rivalry.

So who is the Redskins’ top rival? It’s probably a tie among their three NFC East opponents: the Cowboys, the New York Giants and the Philadelphia Eagles. Even though the over-hyped Cowboys consistently fail to meet expectations, “America’s Team” still triggers resentment. And up I-95, both the Eagles and the Giants have tormented the Redskins in recent seasons, so Washington should be passionate about returning the favor.

Don’t count the Baltimore Ravens as a Redskins rival yet. With the teams playing in different conferences, there’s no true “Battle of the Beltway.”

5. Rex Grossman can’t lead this team to the playoffs.

Don’t forget that Grossman quarterbacked the Bears to the Super Bowl in 2006, his fourth year in the NFL, even if cynics say he was along for the ride on a team with a great defense. A more mature quarterback now, he has the talent to take the Redskins to the postseason.

Consider his performance in the win over the Giants: Grossman completed 21 of 34 passes for 305 yards and two touchdowns, and he connected with four receivers during a fourth-quarter touchdown drive that sealed the win. That’s a confident quarterback. (And even if he turns in a dud this Sunday against the Cardinals, that hardly means he’s done; in his 2006 season, he tossed four interceptions and lost two fumbles in a mid-season game against Arizona, and the Bears still won.)

Grossman will never be an elite NFL signal-caller, but the Redskins may not need one to reach the playoffs. Three non-Hall of Famers — Joe Theismann, [Doug Williams](#) and Mark Rypien — quarterbacked the Redskins to Super Bowl wins during the first Gibbs era. Those teams featured an offensive line (“the Hogs”) that provided airtight pass protection. One of Grossman’s drawbacks is his lack of mobility, but if his line can give him time, he can lead the Redskins to respectable heights.

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