



2008 WASHINGTON REDSKINS

Record: 8-8
 4th Place – NFC East
 Head Coach: Jim Zorn

2008		8-8	
Sept. 4	L	7-16	at NY Giants
Sept. 14	W	29-24	New Orleans
Sept. 21	W	24-17	Arizona
Sept. 28	W	26-24	at Dallas
Oct. 5	W	23-17	at Philadelphia
Oct. 12	L	17-19	St. Louis
Oct. 19	W	14-11	Cleveland
Oct. 26	W	25-17	at Detroit
Nov. 3	L	6-23	Pittsburgh
Nov. 16	L	10-14	Dallas
Nov. 23	W	20-17	at Seattle
Nov. 30	L	7-23	NY Giants
Dec. 7	L	10-24	at Baltimore
Dec. 14	L	13-20	at Cincinnati
Dec. 21	W	10-3	Philadelphia
Dec. 28	L	24-27	at San Francisco

Redskins Start Fast, Fade Down Stretch in 2008

Balloons were perched on the ceiling. Confetti was everywhere. Lights were glowing. Let the celebration begin! Problem is the 2008 season was only eight games old.

The Redskins were 6-2 at that point with road wins over NFC East rivals Philadelphia and Dallas, plus another victory over the eventual NFC champion, Arizona. They looked positioned to land in the playoffs and possibly make a deep run to the Super Bowl. Then came one of the most monumental collapses in Redskins history. Six losses in the final eight games left them 8-8 and out of the playoff picture. The finish was deflating for Redskin enthusiasts, and the faces and voices of the players wearing burgundy and gold spelled frustration when it was all over.

“This was a disappointment for everyone here,” tight end Chris Cooley said. “After going 6-2, we had a pretty good shot, and I think everyone felt confident about the way we were playing, and that we could finish up with some wins. Not making the playoffs is nowhere near where we wanted to be and nowhere close to the goals that we set for ourselves.”

But in the whole scheme of things, how disappointing was it? The 2008 Redskins featured a rookie coach who’d never assisted as a coordinator in the NFL, and who brought no grand expectations with him. They’d squeaked into the playoffs the year before with a 9-7 mark, but with the Joe Gibbs-II era over, the universal belief was they’d be in a rebuilding mode and probably wouldn’t finish any better than in 2007.

Gibbs also went 8-8 in his rookie season in 1981, winning eight of his last 11 games to jumpstart a Redskins glory period highlighted by three Super Bowl wins. But Zorn’s debut was less encouraging because of how the Redskins fell apart in the second half of the year, when their anemic offense averaged only 12.5 points a game compared with 20.6 during the first eight games. *That’s* what really left a sour feeling in Redskins fans.

In Zorn’s view, the point-production problem stemmed from the offense hitting a “road block” in the second half of the season, when the Redskins collided with five of the top eight defenses in the NFL. They lost four of those five games, including one in the ninth week against a Steelers team that boasted the eventual No. 1 defense in the league and captured Super Bowl XLIII. Zorn singled out that game, as well as losses two weeks later to the Cowboys (No. 8 defense) and the Ravens (No. 2) on Dec. 7 as ones that took a “toll on us.” The Redskins’ defense finished fourth in the league and kept the squad in game after game but couldn’t fully compensate for an often-woeful offense that placed 19th in the league.

“We had injuries, we faced some very difficult schemes,” Zorn said. “Even then we moved the ball, but we had a hard time scoring. In a nutshell, that third quarter (of the season) caused us to create doubt. We started getting better again and ... proved that we could battle back and score in the red zone. I was very excited about that.”

As the Redskins' Coaching Search Turns

Those hoping for a quick decision on the Redskins' new coach were subjected to what felt like a marathon. The 32-day search emitted signs of a soap opera, a suspenseful, chaotic, exhausting and maddening period that seemed like it would never end.

The hiring was a stunner. The selection, Jim Zorn, had been named Redskins offensive coordinator just two weeks earlier and hadn't even been a coordinator in the NFL prior to coming to D.C. Furthermore, his name had never appeared in any media reports of possible candidates seeking or rumored to fill a head coaching position in the NFL. And Redskins owner Dan Snyder didn't make his signature "big splash" like he did with past hirings in big-name coaches Marty Schottenheimer, Steve Spurrier and Joe Gibbs. Only the Redskins' brass knew that Zorn was being considered for the job.

During the search, Snyder and his sidekick, front-office executive Vinny Cerrato, interviewed candidates who appeared to be much better suited than Zorn for the position. They included Gregg Williams, the Redskins' defensive coordinator for the past four seasons under Gibbs, former Giants head coach and Ravens offensive coordinator Jim Fassel, and Steve Spagnuolo, defensive coordinator of a Giants team that just won Super Bowl XLII.

Also available was a marquee coaching name, Bill Cowher. An NFL analyst for CBS who had resigned from coaching following the 2006 season, he won a Super Bowl and established himself as one of the most successful coaches in league history in 15 seasons in Pittsburgh. (On Oct. 29, 2008, *The Washington Times* reported that Snyder had contacted Cowher about the job, and it quoted Cowher as saying "that it wasn't the right time" for him to return to coaching.) Other big names floating around included former Ravens coach Brian Billick, who had just been fired after a nine-year tenure in Baltimore that included a Super Bowl win, former 49ers and Lions coach Steve Mariucci, and USC's Pete Carroll, one of the winningest coaches in college football and a former Jets coach.

Williams seemed the most logical choice to fill the position vacated by Gibbs on Jan. 8, 2008, and was pegged in the press as the early front-runner. His Redskin defenses had finished 3rd (2004), 9th (2005), 31st (2006) and 8th (2007) in the NFL. Snyder had cited the importance of "continuity" in finding a new coach, and from the moment Gibbs stepped down, Redskin players on both sides of the ball voiced support for Williams to get the job. In his only head coaching stint, he finished 17-31 in three seasons in Buffalo (2001-03).

Williams interviewed four times, but Snyder and Cerrato dragged their feet on hiring him. Gibbs hadn't mentioned or endorsed Williams in his parting press conference, and media reports said Williams had badmouthed Gibbs during the interview process, something Williams vehemently denied. It was also rumored that Williams had rubbed Gibbs the wrong way by not telling him about his plan to open the Buffalo game on Dec. 2, 2007, with 10 men on defense in honor of the just-murdered Sean Taylor.