

Said Coleman, "To look over and see 50,000 people cheering for you, we're playing our rival team and to go out and play the way we played, the crowd played a big part in it."

With 12 seconds left, Gibbs was carried off the field on his players' shoulders, while fans rushed the field and tore down the goalposts. Players from both teams, thinking the game was over, began heading to their locker rooms. But there was time for one more play, although some of the Cowboys were reluctant to again take the field knowing they were about to lose their third straight NFC championship game.

"They were totally demoralized, they were so pissed," Starke said. "The officials had to drag them out of the locker room, they wouldn't come out. The quarterback wouldn't come out."

A wide receiver, Pearson, took the final snap and put his Cowboys out of their misery.

Dallas—	3	0	14	0	—	17
Washington—	7	7	7	10	—	31

Dallas — FG Septien 27

Wash — Brown 19 pass from Theismann (Moseley kick)

Wash — Riggins 1 run (Moseley kick)

Dallas — Pearson 6 pass from Hogeboom (Septien kick)

Wash — Riggins 4 run (Moseley kick)

Dallas — Johnson 23 pass from Hogeboom (Septien kick)

Wash — FG Moseley 29

Wash — Grant 10 interception return (Moseley kick)

SUPER BOWL XVII

Washington 27, Miami 17

January 30, 1983

Rose Bowl, Pasadena, Calif.

Attendance: 103,667

Day of the Diesel: Riggins Carries Redskins to First Super Bowl Win

John Riggins had carried the Redskins this far, but he wasn't about to stop churning his powerful legs. In the process, he carved a spot in football immortality.

His venue was Super Bowl XVII. The beefy running back knocked the Dolphins' defense silly by rushing 38 times for a Super Bowl-record 166 yards in a prime-time production of the Riggo drill. Forty-three of his yards came on a touchdown run that stands as the most famous play in Redskins history and is indelibly engraved in Super Bowl lore.

The run, executed when Riggins grandly took his cue on a fourth-and-1 play in the fourth quarter, erased a 17-13 Dolphins lead. The Redskins proceeded to win, 27-17, and Riggins was unanimously named the game's MVP. "John was basically an unstoppable force through the whole game," Redskins quarterback Joe Theismann said.

Dolphins defensive end Doug Betters agreed: "We just couldn't stop him. He seemed to get stronger as the game progressed and was relentlessly running on us. We were kind of grinding down. He wasn't going to be denied."

Riggins's performance punctuated his near superhuman exploits in the four-game Super Bowl Tournament. The workhorse ran 136 times for 610 yards and four touchdowns, becoming the first player to rush for 100 or more yards in four

straight playoff games: 119 against Detroit, 185 against Minnesota, 140 against Dallas, and 166 against Miami. "I was just a foot soldier waiting for my next command," Riggins once said of his yeoman display.

Truth be told, Riggins was not the only Redskin standout on that incandescent day. Theismann completed 15 of 23 passes for 143 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions, wrapping up a superb postseason of his own when he posted a phenomenal 110.8 quarterback rating and a 68.2 completion percentage.

And the Redskins' defense was sensational. The swarming unit suffocated the Dolphins by holding them to 176 yards and nine first downs. Miami rushed for 96 yards, the fifth straight game and sixth in the last seven the Redskins had held a team to less than 100 on the ground. Quarterbacks David Woodley and Don Strock, who subbed for Woodley on the last series of the game, completed 4 of 17 passes and missed on all 12 of his throws in the second half, when the Dolphins posted 34 yards, two first downs, and no completions.

"It was just one of those games where you catch stride," Redskins linebacker Monte Coleman said in looking back. "We put lots of pressure on [Woodley] in the second half. We came out with a blitzing scheme and sent safeties, linebackers at him trying to keep him off balance as much as possible. We were sending guys from all over the place."

Miami's defense, in contrast, yielded 400 yards, 276 on the ground, after showing its stinginess earlier in the playoffs. In a 14-0 AFC championship game win over the Jets, for example, the Dolphins intercepted five passes and allowed 139 yards, including only 46 by NFL rushing champ Freeman McNeal. For the Super Bowl, the Dolphins believed that by controlling the bulwark of the Redskins' offense, Riggins, they would have an excellent shot at winning. But the Redskins had no plans to deemphasize Riggo. "We'd be dumb to do anything else but to get on that wagon and let Riggins hitch up and pull us along," Redskins offensive line coach Joe Bugel said leading up to the game.

"With a guy like Riggins, a Hall of Fame running back, you knew you had to stop him," Miami defensive end Kim Bokamper said in retrospect. "He wasn't our sole focus, but we knew first and foremost Riggins was going to be the key."

The Dolphins, one of only four teams to beat Washington in the last 22 games, scored on their fifth play from scrimmage. Wide receiver Jimmy Cefalo outran cornerback Tony Peters down the right sideline, and Woodley hit him with a 76-yard touchdown pass.

Miami's defense stopped Washington on two subsequent drives. But late in the first quarter, Redskin defensive end Dexter Manley sacked Woodley and forced a fumble, and defensive tackle Dave Butz recovered on the Dolphins' 46. The turnover set up Mark Moseley's 31-yard field goal.

Miami answered with Fulton Walker's 42-yard kickoff return and a 14-play, 50-yard march that chewed up nearly nine minutes until it stalled on the Redskins' 3. Uwe von Schamann's 20-yard field goal put Miami up, 10-3, six minutes before halftime. Woodley's three completions on the drive were, amazingly, his last ones of the game.

The Redskins responded with an 11-play, 80-yard march that ended with the tying score, Theismann's 4-yard touchdown pass to Alvin Garrett in the corner of the end zone, a play similar to the fade patterns Garrett had run earlier in the playoffs that resulted in touchdowns. It was the fifth touchdown catch for the once obscure receiver in the Super

Bowl Tournament. Moseley's conversion tied the game at 10.

Walker victimized the Redskins again by running the kick-off back 98 yards for a score, the first time a Super Bowl kickoff had been returned for a touchdown, to put Miami up at halftime, 17–10. Only three teams had rebounded from halftime deficits in the Super Bowl to win, but the Redskins were not in panic mode.

"[Defensive coordinator] Richie Petitbon was a master at making halftime adjustments," Coleman said. "We made the necessary adjustments and carried them out."

On offense, the Redskins planned to continue with the heart of their game plan: running Riggins in a smash-mouth system behind the Hogs and overpowering Miami's smaller but faster defensive front known as the "Killer B's." The Redskins, who dominated time of possession by more than 12 minutes, ran mostly to the side where 6–7, 300-pound left tackle Joe Jacoby outweighed Bokamper, a right defensive end, by about 50 pounds.

"They relied on quickness and flying to the football, and we were methodical and more of a slug-it-out team," Jacoby said. "We didn't want to get into a sprinting contest with them. We wanted to just keep the ball on the ground and march up and down the field. We pretty much stayed with our whole game plan and used our size to just slowly, methodically wear them down."

Case in point: On the opening drive of the second half, the Redskins chewed up nearly seven minutes and moved 63 yards in 18 plays before settling for Moseley's 20-yard field goal. Both offenses failed to threaten for the rest of the third quarter, although the Dolphins came inches from taking perhaps an insurmountable 24–13 lead.

From his own 18, Theismann threw a pass that was tipped by Bokamper, who looked up at the fluttering ball and appeared ready to catch it unimpeded from the goal line. The ball hit Bokamper's hands, but quarterback-turned-defensive-back Theismann reached in to knock it down. The Redskins breathed a huge sigh of relief, while Bokamper agonized over coming so close. "It was a pretty heads-up play by Theismann," Bokamper said. "A lot of quarterbacks would stand there and just watch the ball come down. He had the wherewithal to go make a play. It ended up making the difference."

Said Theismann, "Suddenly, the ball goes up in the air, and time almost stopped for me. It's like my whole world went into slow motion. My legs felt like they were in quicksand. I kept moving toward where I thought the ball was going to be and just figured if I could dive and maybe get my hands in between Kim's, I could strip the ball away. In almost a desperate effort, I just sort of lurched and leaned forward and managed to knock it down." Otherwise, "He would have had a touchdown, and we would have lost the football game."

Theismann was intercepted on the drive. Then Miami went three-and-out for the third time in the half, and Washington took possession on its 48 early in the fourth quarter.

By then, Riggins had pounded the Dolphins' defense with runs of 4 to 6 yards, having totaled 93 on 27 carries. But the Diesel was only warming up. He ran twice for 8 yards, and H-back Clarence Harmon gained 1. It was judgment time, for Washington faced fourth-and-inches on the Miami 43 with a little more than 10 minutes left and the Dolphins leading, 17–13. Although failure may have meant ultimate defeat for the Redskins, plus a chance at avenging the franchise's loss to Miami in Super Bowl VII, Gibbs opted to go for it.

The Dolphins' defense stacked the line, expecting the same scenario as the 103,667 fans at the Rose Bowl and the 100 million television viewers around the world: a run by big No. 44. "We basically knew the Redskins so well that you could call when John Riggins was going to get the ball," said Sam Huff, one of the Redskins radio color analysts at the game. "So did the Miami Dolphins. Stopping him was another thing."

Theismann called the play in the huddle: "Goal line, goal line. I-left, tight wing, 70 chip on white." Tight end Clint Didier went in motion and circled back. Dolphins cornerback Don McNeal, who was following Didier, slipped momentarily. At that moment, Theismann handed off to Riggins, who headed for a huge hole on the left side created by H-back Otis Wonsley, Jacoby, and another Hog, left guard Russ Grimm.

Redskin blockers accounted for every defender except McNeal, who stepped up and aimed to stop Riggins short of the first down. "I said, 'Man, I'm going to make this tackle. This is going to be great,'" McNeal remembered. The 5–11, 185-pounder, slightly off-balance, hit Riggins on the side around the numbers and slid down, holding onto his jersey



John Riggins breaks away from the Dolphins' Don McNeal on his famous 43-yard scoring run that provided the Redskins' winning points in Super Bowl XVII. Riggins put the Redskins on his shoulders that season in the playoffs. The workhorse ran 136 times for 610 yards and four touchdowns, including 166 in his MVP performance in the Super Bowl. "I was just a foot soldier waiting for my next command," he said.



Charlie Brown (87) scores on a 7-yard pass from Joe Theismann that sealed the Redskins' win over Miami. Alvin Garrett (89) scored earlier on a Theismann pass.

around the waistline. Riggo unceremoniously shook McNeal off and steamrolled through with only daylight ahead. With his face exuding determination, he raced untouched down the left sideline into the Southern California sunset and crossed the goal line for the longest touchdown run in Super Bowl history at the time. "That shot is one of our classics," NFL Films Executive Director Steve Sabol said. "Just his face so contorted with how intense he was, and the expression of his face pinched under his helmet." Riggins was mobbed in the end zone by his convoy, the Hogs, who at the same time hoisted themselves into the global football conscience.

To Sabol, the run featured elements of a classic moment: "It was a game-deciding play in the fourth quarter of a close game by a Hall of Fame player. There were no penalties and no controversies on the play. It was, in a way, symbolic of the Redskins, the Joe Gibbs offense and the Riggo drill. It was fourth-and-1, and Riggins just ran over Don McNeal. As much of a finesse coach as Gibbs was, he was also a guy who would look you in the eye and say, 'Here we come, our best against your best, see if you can stop us.' It was also the crowning moment for the Hogs."

Theismann said the touchdown was the nadir for the Dolphins: "I think when John basically ran over the defensive back, they probably had to say to themselves, 'How in God's name are we going to stop this guy?'"

Said Doug Betters, "I don't think we folded our tent and went home, but we were definitely demoralized by that. It was the whole concept of having a diesel truck just running over you and not being able to stop him."

Miami went nowhere in four plays. And with who else but Riggins carrying on 8 of 12 plays, the Redskins drove 41 yards for another touchdown, Theismann's 7-yard pass to Charlie Brown with 1:55 left. Soon after, ecstatic Redskins hoisted

Gibbs onto their shoulders and carried the NFL's newest coaching phenom off the field.

"It's hard to put in words what it's like to win a Super Bowl, but it was like a dream come true," said Coleman, part of a Redskins roster that earned \$70,000 per player for winning the Super Bowl Tournament.

In the euphoric Redskins locker room, President Reagan called to offer congratulations to Gibbs. The president also asked if he could change the spelling of his last name by putting an "i" and another "g" in it so it would sound like Riggins. The game's MVP, meanwhile, chimed in with one of his outrageous remarks: "At least for tonight, Ron's the president, and I'm the king."

Everyone associated with the Redskins had a right to feel like royalty. At least 500,000 fans flooded the streets of Washington and braved a torrential downpour to pay tribute to their new champions, as the Redskins rode through town with the shiny Vince Lombardi trophy. "Each one of you has a small piece of this trophy today," Gibbs said.

There would be more Super Bowl trophies to come.

Miami—	7	10	0	0	—	17
Washington—	0	10	3	14	—	27

- Miami — Cefalo 76 pass from Woodley (von Schamann kick)
- Wash — FG Moseley 31
- Miami — FG von Schamann 20
- Wash — Garrett 4 pass from Theismann (Moseley kick)
- Miami — Walker 98 kickoff return (von Schamann kick)
- Wash — FG Moseley 20
- Wash — Riggins 43 run (Moseley kick)
- Wash — Brown 6 pass from Theismann (Moseley kick)



NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle presents the Vince Lombardi trophy to Redskins owner Jack Kent Cooke in his team's jubilant locker room. NBC's Mike Adamle holds the microphone, as coach Joe Gibbs (far right) looks on.

Team Statistics	Miami	Wash
First Downs	9	24
Total Yards	176	400
Rushing Yards	96	276
Passing Yards	80	124
Passes	4-17-1	15-23-2
Sacks Allowed	1-17	3-19
Return Yards	244	109
Punts-Average	6-37.8	3-45.7
Penalties	4-55	5-36
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	0-0
Time of Possession	23:45	36:15

RUSHING

Miami—Franklin 16-49; Nathan 7-26; Woodley 4-16; Vigorito 1-4; Harris 1-1
 Washington—Riggins 38-166, 1 TD; Garrett 1-44; Harmon 9-40; Theismann 3-20; Walker 1-6

PASSING

Miami—Woodley 4-14-97, 1 TD, 1 INT; Strock 0-3
 Washington—Theismann 15-23-143, 2 TD, 2 INT

RECEIVING

Miami—Cefalo 2-82, 1 TD; Harris 2-15
 Washington—Brown 6-60, 1 TD; Warren 5-28; Garrett 2-13, 1 TD; Walker 1-27; Riggins 1-15

1983: 14-2, 1ST PLACE—NFC EAST

Head Coach: Joe Gibbs

What do you call a team that scores an NFL-record 541 points, posts a remarkable plus-43 turnover ratio, loses a total of two regular season games by one point each, and annihilates oppo-

nent after opponent en route to reaching its second straight Super Bowl?

A juggernaut, perhaps.

The 1983 Redskins ran roughshod over their NFL brethren, literally and figuratively, and operated with a dominance rarely seen before in pro football history. Mercy was not in the Redskins' lexicon, for in addition to rewriting the league's record books, they set new all-time team marks such as total yards (6,139), points scored (541), and regular season wins (14).

The awesome demonstration propelled the Redskins to an NFC East title, followed by a 44-point annihilation of the Rams in the playoff opener and a win over the 49ers in the NFC championship game. Next was Super Bowl XVIII, but that's where the Redskins met their match. The Los Angeles Raiders treated the burgundy and gold like paperweights in a 38-9 wipeout. The defeat, compounded by the largest losing margin at the time in Super Bowl history, 29 points, tainted a historic Redskins season.

"We were the best team in the history of football," said Redskins quarterback Joe Theismann, the league MVP that season. "That will never be known because we didn't win a Super Bowl."

Guard Russ Grimm rated the 1983 team above the Redskins' 1991 squad that finished 14-2 and advanced to win Super Bowl XXVI, but he shared Theismann's frustrating sentiment. "The best team I played on was the 1983 team. We lost two games that year by one point. We averaged nearly 35 points a game. But we didn't win the big one."

The Redskins had several league leaders that year. Joe Gibbs was named NFL Coach of the Year for the second straight season. Theismann enjoyed the best season of his 12-year NFL career, completing 60.1 percent of his passes with career highs of 3,714 yards and 29 touchdowns and a career-low 11 interceptions. His 97.0 quarterback rating was second in the NFL, behind Atlanta's Steve Bartkowski (97.6). His favorite target was receiver Charlie Brown, who caught a team-record 78 passes.